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POETRY & LIFE

ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

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*Dante Gabriel Rossetti.*

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

BY

MRS. F. S. BOAS

Author of "With Milton and  
the Cavaliers" etc.



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## GENERAL PREFACE

**A** GLANCE through the pages of this little book will suffice to disclose the general plan of the series of which it forms a part. Only a few words of explanation, therefore, will be necessary.

The point of departure is the undeniable fact that with the vast majority of young students of literature a living interest in the work of any poet can best be aroused, and an intelligent appreciation of it secured, when it is immediately associated with the character and career of the poet himself. The cases are indeed few and far between in which much fresh light will not be thrown upon a poem by some knowledge of the personality of the writer, while it will often be found that the most direct—perhaps even the only—way to the heart of its meaning lies through a consideration of the circumstances in which it had its birth. The purely æsthetic critic may possibly object that a poem should be regarded simply as a self-contained and detached piece of art, having no personal affiliations or bearings. Of the validity of this as an abstract principle nothing need now be said. The fact remains that, in the earlier stages of study at any rate, poetry is most valued and loved when it is made to seem most human and vital ; and the human and vital interest of poetry can be most surely brought home to the reader by the biographical method of interpretation.

## GENERAL PREFACE

This is to some extent recognized by writers of histories and text-books of literature, and by editors of selections from the works of our poets ; for place is always given by them to a certain amount of biographical material. But in the histories and text-books the biography of a given writer stands by itself, and his work has to be sought elsewhere, the student being left to make the connexion for himself ; while even in our current editions of selections there is little systematic attempt to link biography, step by step, with production.

This brings us at once to the chief purpose of the present series. In this, biography and production will be considered together and in intimate association. In other words, an endeavour will be made to interest the reader in the lives and personalities of the poets dealt with, and at the same time to use biography as an introduction and key to their writings.

Each volume will therefore contain the life-story of the poet who forms its subject. In this, attention will be specially directed to his personality as it expressed itself in his poetry, and to the influences and conditions which counted most as formative factors in the growth of his genius. This biographical study will be used as a setting for a selection, as large as space will permit, of his representative poems. Such poems, where possible, will be reproduced in full, and care will be taken to bring out their connexion with his character, his circumstances, and the movement of his mind. Then, in

# GENERAL PREFACE

addition, so much more general literary criticism will be incorporated as may seem to be needed to supplement the biographical material, and to exhibit both the essential qualities and the historical importance of his work.

It is believed that the plan thus pursued is substantially in the nature of a new departure, and that the volumes of this series, constituting as they will an introduction to the study of some of our greatest poets, will be found useful to teachers and students of literature, and no less to the general lover of English poetry.

WILLIAM HENRY HUDSON

## PREFATORY NOTE

**I** HAVE to thank Mr. W. M. Rossetti and Messrs. Ellis and Elvey for their kind permission to quote freely from the historical ballads "The White Ship" and "The King's Tragedy."

H. O'B. B.

# POEMS QUOTED IN WHOLE

	PAGE
✓St. Luke the Painter	16
✓My Sister's Sleep	24
The Blessed Damozel	30
The Carillon (afterwards renamed Ant- werp and Bruges)	41
From the Cliffs (afterwards renamed The Sea-Limits)	43
Pax Vobis (afterwards renamed World's Worth)	44
A Dance of Nymphs, by Andrea Man- tegna ; in the Louvre (afterwards re- named For an Allegorical Dance of Women, by Andrea Mantegna)	46
Between Ghent and Bruges	48
The Portrait	96
Lilith (afterwards renamed Body's Beauty)	104
First Love Remembered	117
Lovesight	120
Love-Sweetness	120
The Monochord	121
Lost Days	122
Lost on Both Sides	123
A Superscription	123

# POEMS QUOTED

	PAGE
Venus (afterwards renamed Venus Verticordia)	137
On Refusal of Aid between Nations	138

## POEMS QUOTED IN PART

Ave	51
✓ The Burden of Nineveh	56, 57, 58, 59
The Staff and Scrip	61, 62, 63, 64, 65
A Last Confession	75, 76, 77, 79, 80, 81
✓ Sister Helen	84, 86, 88, 89, 90
Eden Bower	105, 106, 107, 109, 110
Love's Nocturne	117, 118
The One Hope	124
Troy Town	135, 136
The King's Tragedy	140, 141, 142, 143
The White Ship	144, 145
Rose Mary	146

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

**G**ABRIEL CHARLES DANTE ROSSETTI was born in Charlotte Street, Portland Place, London, on May 12, 1828. From about the year 1850 he used only two of his Christian names, and reversed their order : thus the world has always known him as Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

London happened to be his birthplace, and his life was spent in England, but he was not an Englishman except by birth ; this is important to remember when he is criticized adversely for not possessing certain essentially British characteristics which by birth he did not inherit. His mother's mother was English, but his other three grandparents were Italian.

His father, Gabriele Rossetti, was a politician and patriot of no mean order in the kingdom of Naples. He took an active part in the rising of 1820 ; and, owing to its failure, he had to leave the country, and fled to England, the home of the homeless.

Gabriele Rossetti's own literary gifts were considerable : he was an enthusiastic student of Dante—hence his son's name—and published critical works on that poet, and also other compositions, both in prose and verse. In 1826 he married Frances Polidori, the daughter of an Italian of literary and poetic reputation, and



## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

there were four children of the marriage. Polidori's wife had been English, her maiden name was Pierce ; and from her came the only British blood that ran in Rossetti's veins.

Of the four children of Gabriele Rossetti and Frances Polidori the eldest was a daughter, Maria Francesca, who died in 1876 ; the second was Dante Gabriel ; the third the well-known art critic, William Michael, who was his brother's junior only by a year ; and the youngest Christina Georgina, the gifted poetess, who died in 1894.

In 1831 Gabriele Rossetti had been appointed Professor of Italian Literature at King's College, and he held the post till the year 1845, when his sight began to fail and he was obliged to resign it. Owing to their father's position and interests the children grew up in congenial surroundings, and in a fine intellectual atmosphere. What early records remain of the childhood of the great poet-painter point to busy happy days, and to the warmest family affection.

After a short time at a preparatory school, Rossetti entered King's College School in 1837 and remained there for six years, until he was fifteen : to the Latin and Greek and French which he there acquired he added Italian and German learned at home.

There was evidently a habit of affectionate companionship among the different members of the family, and it is pleasant to remember that, in spite of the various changes and

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

sorrows inevitable to such a nature as his, family affection never failed Rossetti throughout his life. His father died in 1854, but in intercourse and in correspondence he and his mother were united to the end ; both she and his sister Christina were with him in the last sad days at Birchington, and shared the watch of his faithful lifelong friend and companion, his only brother William Michael, to whose literary work on his behalf we owe so much.

In letters of his own, and in touches here and there by his brother and other friends, we can catch a glimpse of the cheerful, intellectual, and affectionate atmosphere in which Rossetti's boyhood was passed.

Two letters to his aunts, Margaret and Eliza Polidori, give charming hints of that early home-life. The first was written before he was seven, and the family standard—or that of the day—must have been high in the matter of letter-writing, for his brother speaks of him as “backward—or one might say lazy—at letter-writing.”

“ 38 Charlotte Street, London.

“ 7 April, 1835.

“ Dear Aunt M.,—Papa has bought two shawls for Maria and Christina. Dr. Curci, a great friend of papa's, came from Naples, and has given Christina a little locket without hair, of the Virgin Mary with Jesus Christ in her arms ; it has a rim of mother-of-pearl. Papa introduced Dr. Curci to a party where there

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

was the Turkish Ambassador, who asked papa to improvise.

“ I remain,

“ Your affectionate nephew,

“GABRIEL ROSSETTI.”

“ 38 Charlotte Street, London.

“ 9 July, 1835.

“ Dear Aunt Eliza,—We went to a fancy fair in the Regent’s Park, where I bought a box of paints, Maria an album, and Christina two fishes and a hook. The fair was for the benefit of a charity school. I have been reading Shakespeare’s ‘Richard the Third’ for my amusement, and like it exceedingly. I, Maria, and William know several scenes by heart. I have bought a picture of Richard and Richmond fighting, and I gilded it, after which I cut it out with no white. My aunt came yesterday, and gave Maria a pretty little basket ; it was worked in flowers of green card.

“ I remain, my dear aunt,

“ Your affectionate nephew,

“GABRIEL C. D. ROSSETTI.”

The poet-painter is seen here, even at seven years old ! The box of paints, and the gilded picture cut out “with no white,” and the enjoyment in learning by heart parts of “Richard the Third,” read, as he proudly puts it, “for my amusement.” There is a letter written about the year 1843, to his grandfather Polidori,

## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

which shows singular literary acumen on the part of a boy of fifteen ; in it he identifies an Italian poem of his grandfather's as a translation of a poem by Sir Henry Wotton in Percy's "Reliques of Ancient English Poetry." There had evidently been some mistake in printing the lines as original ; but the incident throws a pleasant light as to the terms the boy was on with his grandfather, and one cannot but wish that Polidori's reply to his young critic were forthcoming.

Rossetti is described by those who knew him as a boy of strong affections and emotions ; in appearance graceful and slender, with the large round head, massive forehead, curling hair, and brilliant eyes with which his many portraits have made us familiar : the lower part of his face was its weakest, as is not infrequently the case with great men, and the moustache and beard he grew in later life improved his appearance by hiding his mouth.

He was not a boy to shine in the severely bracing atmosphere of an English public school ; but, according to his own words in later life, he endured it though he never liked it, chiefly for the sake of his mother and his desire to please her.

The slight difficulty there is in dealing with him here, where his poetry only is followed, is that painting, *not* literature, was from the first his profession : but with him the two arts were inextricably mingled ; his ideas, his aims, his very subjects were constantly the same.

When he left King's College School he studied



# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

first at an art academy in Bloomsbury, and afterwards at the Antique School of the Royal Academy. There he first came under the influence of Mr. Holman Hunt, with whom, in the autumn of 1847, he joined in renting a studio at 7 Cleveland Street, Fitzroy Square. Previous to this he had worked in the studio of Mr. Ford Madox Brown, and under his kindly guidance. It was in the studio at Cleveland Street that Rossetti began to paint "The Girlhood of Mary Virgin," which was the first of his works to embody the principles of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. At this time he contemplated painting a picture founded on old traditions representing St. Luke preaching with pictures beside him of Christ and the Virgin, drawn by his own hand. The picture was never executed ; but the three sonnets, "Old and New Art," now 74, 75, and 76 in "The House of Life," were inspired by the theme ; and the first of them illustrates with special vividness Rossetti's conception that Art should again become the handmaid of the religious spirit.

## ST. LUKE THE PAINTER

Give honour unto Luke Evangelist ;  
For he it was (the aged legends say)  
Who first taught Art to fold her hands and pray.  
Scarcely at once she dared to rend the mist  
Of devious symbols : but soon having wist  
How sky-breadth and field-silence and this day  
Are symbols also in some deeper way,  
She looked through these to God and was God's priest.

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

And if, past noon, her toil began to irk,  
And she sought talismans, and turned in vain  
To soulless self-reflections of man's skill,—  
Yet now, in this the twilight, she might still  
Kneel in the latter grass to pray again,  
Ere the night cometh and she may not work.

## II

**I**N the autumn of 1848, Rossetti and Holman Hunt saw in Millais' rooms in Gower Street a book of engravings from frescoes in the Campo Santo of Pisa, which seemed to embody the ideals of art toward which the minds of the three friends had been independently struggling. It was from that day that they determined to found what may be called a League of Sincerity, with loftier aims than those usually valued by artists, and with the leading principle that each confessor should paint his best with due reference to nature, without which there could be no sincerity. They had no intention of following, much less copying, the modes and moods of the artists who preceded Raphael, nor of rejecting anything which had been attained in the service of art since the great painter's days.

To the enthusiasm of Rossetti was chiefly due the foundation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, which, though it did not live long in its original form, was destined to effect and develop an important revolution in English art.

The first "Brothers" were Rossetti himself,

## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

Holman Hunt, Millais, and Thomas Woolner ; and they added to their number W. M. Rossetti, Frederic George Stephens, and James Collinson ; the last remained with them but a short time, and was replaced by Walter Howell Deverell. W. M. Rossetti gives as the aim of the Brotherhood, "to show forth what was in them in the way of solid and fresh thought or invention, personal observation, and the intimate study of and strict adherence to nature." They entertained, he says, "a hearty contempt for much of the art—flimsy, frivolous, and conventional—which they saw in practice around them." Sincerity and fidelity to fact were to take the place, with them, of convention ; and, moreover, the temper of prosaic acceptance and domestic materialism was to be replaced by "the temper of wonder, reverence, and awe." Art was to re-enter the domain of the mystic and the supernatural.

Rossetti's own most memorable achievement in painting on Pre-Raphaelite principles was the supremely beautiful panel-picture of the Annunciation, "*Ecce Ancilla Domini*," begun in 1849 and finished in March 1850. The face of the Virgin was a faithful likeness of his sister Christina.

But while this picture was being painted the movement was entering on its literary phase, which was carried on, for a time, in twofold form, by a journal and a magazine.

The journal was to be a chronicle of the doings of each member of the Brotherhood : W. M.

## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

Rossetti was chosen as secretary, and kept the diary from May 1849 till January 1853. Its pages would be of even greater interest than they are had they not been partly destroyed by the impatient hand of D. G. Rossetti, who objected apparently to some of the entries concerned with his own work, and so tore them out and rendered the journal imperfect.

The idea of a magazine which should embody the new views and send them forth to the world was due to Rossetti, who propounded the scheme to his fellow workers in September 1849. The idea soon found favour, but some delay ensued over a title, and a list has been preserved of sixty-one suggested ! They varied in idea from "The Advent" and "Earnest Thoughts," "The Student," "The Chalice," and "The Sphere," to "The Ant" and "The Atom," "The Truth-seeker," "The Mediator," and "The Dawn." "Bud," "Acorn," "Seed," and "Sower" had also been among the proposed titles, and one akin to these was finally chosen, "The Germ," suggested by Mr. W. C. Thomas, the painter. W. M. Rossetti was to be the first editor ; he was not a painter, as were most of the other members, and so had rather more time at his disposal. The first number of "The Germ" appeared on January 1, 1850, and its list of contributors is such as to render somewhat ironical the fact that its course was run with difficulty from the beginning and came to an end with the fourth issue.



# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

This is the table of contents of the first number :

I. My Beautiful Lady	Thomas Woolner.
II. Of my Lady in Death	Thomas Woolner.
III. The Love of Beauty	Ford Madox Brown.
IV. The Subject in Art.	
No. 1	[J. L. Tupper.]
V. The Seasons	[Coventry Patmore.]
VI. Dream-land	Ellen Alleyn.
VII. Songs of One House-	
hold, No. 1. (My	
Sister's Sleep)	Dante Gabriel Rossetti.
VIII. Hand and Soul	Dante Gabriel Rossetti.
IX. " The Bothie of Toper-	
na-fuosich "	Wm. M. Rossetti.
X. Her First Season	Wm. M. Rossetti.
XI. A Sketch from Nature	[J. L. Tupper.]
XII. An End	Ellen Alleyn.
Sonnet (see wrapper)	

Nos. IV, VIII, and IX were in prose ; the rest in verse : " Ellen Alleyn " was the pseudonym which her brothers chose for Christina Rossetti.

The brief course of " The Germ " is one of the strongest instances ever recorded of genius unrecognized by her own time. The very names of its contributors have become household words : they gave their best in an attempt " to claim for poetry that place to which its present development in the literature of the country so emphatically entitles it " ; and, in art, to " encourage and enforce an entire adherence to the simplicity of nature " ; and yet the " forlorn little periodical "—as Mr.

## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

Edmund Gosse has called it—ran a precarious existence for four numbers, and then died for want of funds and lack of public support. None of the Pre-Raphaelite Brothers were rich ; after an entry in their journal, speaking of the financial loss on the first number of “The Germ,” the editor writes : “It seems that the expense to each of us beyond the receipts will be £1 15s. 5d. This is a kind of experiment that won’t bear repetition more than once or twice.” And yet when these early prophets had been well stoned by their contemporaries, a new generation industriously built their sepulchres ! In 1896 three copies of “The Germ ” were sold in London at an average of £7 apiece ; in 1897 the same number averaged £10 each ; and in 1898 the price of a set of choicely bound copies rose to £37 10s.

Rossetti’s contributions to the first issue of “The Germ ” consisted in the prose story “Hand and Soul ” and his beautiful poem “My Sister’s Sleep.” The interest of the first is enhanced by the fact that it is largely autobiographical, also that it expresses throughout the views and aims of the Brotherhood of which its author was the leading spirit.

The incidents and characters in the story are imaginary, but Rossetti puts much of his own nature into that of the hero, Chiaro dell’ Erma, a young Italian painter, who speaks often from the very soul of his creator, in the way common to so many of Browning’s characters.

It is himself he seems to describe as he dwells

## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

on the growing intensity of Chiaro's nature : " The extreme longing after a visible embodiment of his thoughts strengthened as his years increased, more even than his sinews or the blood of his life, until he would feel faint in sunsets and at the sight of stately persons." The painter of Arezzo is Rossetti himself, even in his habits : " Sometimes, after nightfall, he would walk abroad in the most solitary places he could find, hardly feeling the ground under him because of the thoughts of the day which held him in fever." They are the same in feeling : " With all that Chiaro had done during these three years, and even before, with the studies of his early youth, there had always been a feeling of worship and service. It was the peace-offering that he made to God and to his own soul for the eager selfishness of his aim. There was earth, indeed, upon the hem of his raiment ; but *this* was of the heaven, heavenly." Chiaro's words, when the iron of despondency had entered into his soul, might be a prophecy of Rossetti's own future : " Fame failed me : faith failed me : and now this also—the hope that I nourished in this my generation of men—shall pass from me, and leave my feet and my hands groping. Yet, because of this, are my feet become slow and my hands thin. I am as one who, through the whole night, holding his way diligently, hath smitten the steel into the flint, to lead some whom he knew darkling ; who hath kept his eyes always on the sparks that himself made, lest they should

## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

fail ; and who, towards dawn, turning to bid them that he had guided God-speed, sees the wet grass untrodden except of his own feet." Surely the hopelessness of failure has hardly ever been drawn with a finer or more perfect touch than in these words : the delicate beauty of the passage is beyond all comment. The spirit of the Pre-Raphaelites breathes in every page of the story, until it finds its most perfect expression in Chiaro's vision, which might have been Rossetti's own. "And when she that spoke had said these words within Chiaro's spirit, she left his side quietly, and stood up as he had first seen her ; with her fingers laid together, and her eyes steadfast, and with the breadth of her long dress covering her feet on the floor." The figure might be drawn from one of his own pictures, each touch describes his method so exactly.

And once again she spoke to him, this time in the solemn accents of farewell. "Chiaro, servant of God, take now thine art unto thee, and paint me thus, as I am, to know me : weak, as I am, and in the weeds of this time ; only with eyes which seek out labour, and with a faith not learned, yet jealous of prayer. Do this ; so shall thy soul stand before thee always, and perplex thee no more."

The words that had been spoken to Chiaro by "the fair woman, that was his soul," might well stand for Rossetti's dedication of his own life, spoken as they were upon its very threshold.

His other contribution to the first number



# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

of "The Germ," the poem "My Sister's Sleep," was possibly the first work of his which was ever published. It had been written about the age of nineteen ; and his brother, when speaking of their visits to an old friend, Major Calder Campbell, a retired Indian officer of literary tastes, writes as follows : " I well remember that, at the instance of Calder Campbell, ' My Sister's Sleep ' was produced to the editress of ' La Belle Assemblée,' a magazine of that date, 1847 or 1848, which must have seen better days aforetime, but was then still tolerably well accepted in the regions of light literature. The editress certainly admired the poem, and perhaps she inserted it ; if so, this was the very first appearance of Dante Rossetti in published print."

We give the poem in full in its final form as it appears in the Collected Works, and we also give, within brackets, four verses which are omitted there, but which appeared in the first copy of " The Germ " :

## MY SISTER'S SLEEP

She fell asleep on Christmas Eve.  
At length the long-ungranted shade  
Of weary eyelids overweigh'd  
The pain naught else might yet relieve.

Our mother, who had leaned all day  
Over the bed from chime to chime,  
Then raised herself for the first time,  
And as she sat her down, did pray.

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

Her little work-table was spread  
With work to finish. For the glare  
Made by her candle, she had care  
To work some distance from the bed.

Without, there was a cold moon up,  
Of winter radiance sheer and thin ;  
The hollow halo it was in  
Was like an icy crystal cup.

Through the small room, with subtle sound  
Of flame, by vents the fire-shine drove  
And reddened. In its dim alcove  
The mirror shed a clearness round.

I had been sitting up some nights,  
And my tired mind felt weak and blank ;  
Like a sharp strengthening wine it drank  
The stillness and the broken lights.

[Silence was speaking at my side  
With an exceedingly clear voice :  
I knew the calm as in a choice  
Made in God for me, to abide.

I said, " Full knowledge does not grieve :  
This which upon my spirit dwells  
Perhaps would have been sorrow else :  
But I am glad 'tis Christmas Eve." ]

Twelve struck. That sound, by dwindling years  
Heard in each hour, crept off ; and then  
The ruffled silence spread again,  
Like water that a pebble stirs.

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

Our mother rose from where she sat :  
Her needles, as she laid them down,  
Met lightly, and her silken gown  
Settled : no other noise than that.

“ Glory unto the Newly Born ! ”  
So, as said angels, she did say ;  
Because we were in Christmas Day,  
Though it would still be long till morn.

[She stood a moment with her hands  
Kept in each other, praying much ;  
A moment that the soul may touch  
But the heart only understands.

Almost unwittingly, my mind  
Repeated her words after her ;  
Perhaps tho' my lips did not stir ;  
It was scarce thought, or cause assign'd.]

Just then in the room over us  
There was a pushing back of chairs,  
As some who had sat unawares  
So late, now heard the hour, and rose.

With anxious softly-stepping haste  
Our mother went where Margaret lay,  
Fearing the sounds o'erhead—should they  
Have broken her long watched-for rest !

She stopped an instant, calm, and turned ;  
But suddenly turned back again ;  
And all her features seemed in pain  
With woe, and her eyes gazed and yearned.

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

For my part, I but hid my face,  
And held my breath, and spoke no word :  
There was none spoken ; but I heard  
The silence for a little space.

Our mother bowed herself and wept :  
And both my arms fell, and I said,  
“ God knows I knew that she was dead.”  
And there, all white, my sister slept.

Then kneeling, upon Christmas morn  
A little after twelve o'clock,  
We said, ere the first quarter struck,  
“ Christ's blessing on the newly born ! ”

The metre of this poem is the same as that always associated with Tennyson's “ In Memoriam,” though the rhythm is so different that they are not always recognized as identical : it is interesting to notice that W. M. Rossetti writes in the “ Pre-Raphaelite Journal ” for November 2, 1849 : “ I saw Tennyson's MS. book of elegies on young Hallam, which are to be published some day.” “ In Memoriam ” was published in the following year.

Rossetti, like Tennyson, constantly altered his verse, and polished it with minute care. Sometimes he seems to sacrifice beauty of thought to that of form, as in the case here in verse 12, where the original version of the poem has “ she stooped ” and the later form changes it to “ she stopped ” ; and again, in verse 4, where the original ends in two lines



# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

which are surely more beautiful than those in the later edition :

The depth of light that it was in  
Seemed hollow like an altar-cup.

On the other hand, he gets rid of the rhyme "born" and "dawn" which originally marred verse 9, and in most of the alterations the form benefits.

The second number of "The Germ" came out in February and contained only one contribution by Rossetti, but this was "The Blessed Damozel," probably the most famous of all his works. It had been written before he was nineteen, and must always stand as an extraordinary production for a boy of that age, in whatever light it is regarded. He was an ardent admirer of Edgar Allan Poe ; and, speaking in later life to a friend about the origin of "The Blessed Damozel," he said : "I saw that Poe had done the utmost it was possible to do with the grief of the lover on earth, and so I determined to reverse the conditions, and give utterance to the yearning of the loved one in Heaven." Poetry, indeed, owes a debt of gratitude to the "sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore," if from her sprang the immortal creation of "The Blessed Damozel" ! Rossetti's very name has become associated with her ; he painted her over and over again, but in verse or on canvas she is always the same, the glorified maiden leaning from Heaven to speak her thoughts of earth, the like of

## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

whom has never been drawn by another hand. She may lean from her gold bar in the pictured purity of her white lilies and her shining hair, or she may utter the words that seem to thrill from Heaven to earth, the effect is the same ; Rossetti's marvellous creative power is behind each : the picture once seen, the poem once heard, something has entered into life that was not there before, that cannot be ignored, that will not pass away. Bunyan's shepherds saw the Holy City from afar, Gerontius in his Dream was caught up to it, but the " Blessed Damozel " stood within it, and spoke from out the radiance of the " glass and gold, with God for its sun." Some readers may stumble at the concrete image of the " gold bar of Heaven," but to many that, and the vivid imagery throughout the poem, seem to reflect the glories of an even greater piece of word-painting, that from which we glean what knowledge we have of the " City that has no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it," whose painter did not fear to use concrete forms in describing it ; whose " foundations . . . were garnished with all manner of precious stones," and whose " twelve gates were twelve pearls."

The poem, as originally published in " The Germ," was hardly the same in any verse as in the editions of the volumes of 1870 and 1881. There were twenty-five verses in " The Germ," only twenty-four in the later editions : we print from the latest volume, and also give some of the earlier renderings from " The

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

Germ," so that readers may compare the two, and may note the trend of Rossetti's mind in the character of these alterations.

## THE BLESSED DAMOZEL

### I

The blessed damozel leaned out  
From the gold bar of Heaven ;  
Her eyes were deeper than the depth  
Of waters stilled at even ;  
She had three lilies in her hand  
And the stars in her hair were seven.

[Her blue grave eyes were deeper much  
Than a deep water, even.]

### II

Her robe, ungirt from clasp to hem,  
No wrought flowers did adorn,  
But a white rose of Mary's gift,  
For service meetly worn ;  
Her hair that lay along her back  
Was yellow like ripe corn.

[But a white rose of Mary's gift  
On the neck meetly worn ;]

### III

Herseemed she scarce had been a day  
One of God's choristers ;  
The wonder was not yet quite gone  
From that still look of hers ;  
Albeit, to them she left, her day  
Had counted as ten years.

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

## IV

(To one, it is ten years of years.  
    . . . Yet now, and in this place,  
Surely she leaned o'er me—her hair  
    Fell all about my face. . . .  
Nothing : the autumn-fall of leaves.  
    The whole year sets apace.)

## V

It was the rampart of God's house  
    That she was standing on ;  
By God built over the sheer depth  
    The which is Space begun ;  
So high, that looking downward thence  
    She scarce could see the sun.

[It was the terrace of God's house]

## VI

It lies in Heaven, across the flood  
    Of ether, as a bridge.  
Beneath, the tides of day and night  
    With flame and darkness ridge  
The void, as low as where this earth  
    Spins like a fretful midge.

Then comes, in the first edition, a verse omitted later on.

[But in those tracts, with her, it was  
    The peace of utter light  
And silence. For no breeze may stir  
    Along the steady flight  
Of seraphim ; no echo there,  
    Beyond all depth or height.]

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

## VII

Around her, lovers, newly met  
    'Mid deathless love's acclaims,  
Spoke evermore among themselves  
    Their heart-remembered names ;  
And the souls mounting up to God  
    Went by her like thin flames.

[Heard hardly, some of her new friends,  
    Playing at holy games,  
Spoke, gentle-mouthed, among themselves,  
    Their virginal chaste names ;]

## VIII

And still she bowed herself and stooped  
    Out of the circling charm ;  
Until her bosom must have made  
    The bar she leaned on warm,  
And the lilies lay as if asleep  
    Along her bended arm.

## IX

From the fixed place of Heaven she saw  
    Time like a pulse shake fierce  
Through all the worlds. Her gaze still strove  
    Within the gulf to pierce  
Its path ; and now she spoke as when  
    The stars sang in their spheres.

## X

The sun was gone now ; the curled moon  
    Was like a little feather  
Fluttering far down the gulf ; and now  
    She spoke through the still weather.  
Her voice was like the voice the stars  
    Had when they sang together.

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

## XI

(Ah sweet ! Even now, in that bird's song,  
Strove not her accents there,  
Fain to be hearkened ? When those bells  
Possessed the midday air,  
Strove not her steps to reach my side  
Down all the echoing year ?)

## XII

“ I wish that he were come to me,  
For he will come,” she said.  
“ Have I not prayed in Heaven ?—on earth,  
Lord, Lord, has he not pray'd ?  
Are not two prayers a perfect strength ?  
And shall I feel afraid ?

## XIII

When round his head the aureole clings,  
And he is clothed in white,  
I'll take his hand and go with him  
To the deep wells of light ;  
As unto a stream we will step down,  
And bathe there in God's sight.

## XIV

We two will stand beside that shrine,  
Occult, withheld, untrod,  
Whose lamps are stirred continually  
With prayer sent up to God ;  
And see our old prayers, granted, melt  
Each like a little cloud.

[And where each need, revealed, expects  
Its patient period.]



# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

## XV

“ We two will lie i’ the shadow of  
That living mystic tree  
Within whose secret growth the Dove  
Is sometimes felt to be,  
While every leaf that His plumes touch  
Saith His name audibly.

## XVI

“ And I myself will teach to him,  
I myself, lying so,  
The songs I sing here ; which his voice  
Shall pause in, hushed and slow,  
And find some knowledge at each pause,  
Or some new thing to know.”

This verse is omitted later.

[Alas ! to *her* wise simple mind  
These things were all but known  
Before : they trembled on her sense,—  
Her voice had caught their tone.  
Alas for lonely Heaven ! Alas  
For life wrung out alone !]

## XVII

(Alas ! we two, we two, thou say'st !  
Yea, one wast thou with me  
That once of old. But shall God lift  
To endless unity  
The soul whose likeness with thy soul  
Was but its love for thee ?)

[Alas ! and though the end were reached ? . . .  
Was *thy* part understood  
Or borne in trust ? And for her sake

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

Shall this too be found good ?—  
May the close lips that knew not prayer  
Praise ever, though they would ?]

## XIX

“ We two,” she said, “ will seek the groves  
Where the Lady Mary is,  
With her five handmaidens, whose names  
Are five sweet symphonies,  
Cecily, Gertrude, Magdalen,  
Margaret and Rosalys.

## XX

“ Circlewise sit they, with bound locks  
And foreheads garlanded ;  
Into the fine cloth white like flame  
Weaving the golden thread,  
To fashion the birth-robcs for them  
Who are just born, being dead.

## XXI

“ He shall fear, haply, and be dumb.  
Then will I lay my cheek  
To his, and tell about our love,  
Not once abashed or weak :  
And the dear Mother will approve  
My pride, and let me speak.

## XXII

“ Herself shall bring us, hand in hand,  
To Him round whom all souls  
Kneel, the clear-ranged unnumbered head  
Bowed with their aureoles :  
And angels meeting us shall sing  
To their citherns and citoles.

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

## XXIII

“ There will I ask of Christ the Lord  
Thus much for him and me :—  
Only to live as once on earth  
With Love,—only to be,  
As then awhile, for ever now  
Together, I and he.

[“ There will I ask of Christ the Lord  
Thus much for him and me :  
To have more blessing than on earth  
In nowise ; but to be  
As then we were,—being as then  
At peace. Yea, verily.”]

Then comes another verse, omitted later.

[“ Yea, verily ; when he is come  
We will do thus and thus :  
Till this my vigil seems quite strange  
And almost fabulous ;  
We two will live at once, one life ;  
And peace shall be with us.”]

## XXIV

She gazed and listened and then said,  
Less sad of speech than mild,—  
“ All this is when he comes.” She ceased.  
The light thrilled towards her, fill'd  
With angels in strong level flight.  
Her eyes prayed, and she smil'd.

## XXV

(I saw her smile.) But soon their path  
Was vague in distant spheres :  
And then she cast her arms along

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

The golden barriers,  
And laid her face between her hands,  
And wept. (I heard her tears.)

Some have cried out at the drop in the last verse ; at the sudden fall, as it were, from Heaven to earth : the vision glows with the glory of "the deep wells of light," of the sainted handmaidens, and the shining aureoles ; and then it suddenly narrows, and is darkened down to this solitary bowed figure, and the heavenly music is silenced by her sobs ! But this was a characteristic method of the Pre-Raphaelites : they often ended their work in a minor key ; content to leave behind no sense of triumphant attainment, but rather a feeling of endless "desiderium," and of endeavour baffled only to begin anew.

Few verbal criticisms can be given, or are necessary, on such a poem ; but the comparison of the different published forms is interesting and instructive, especially as the changes are almost invariably improvements. There are, of course, obvious instances of Rossetti's faulty rhyming, a matter in which he was careless to the end ; rhythm was always to his ears of far more importance than rhyme. Among such instances are "on " rhyming to "begun," "spheres " to "pierce," "said " to "pray'd," and "cloud " to "God " : in verse xix—there was no numbering originally of the verses, it has been done here merely to avoid confusion in reference—occurs an instance

## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

of inaccurate rhyming of which Rossetti was fond, that of rhyming words of unequal length provided the last syllable was near in sound : in this case the rhymes are "is" and "symphonies." In the original verse which has been omitted before verse vii there are marked instances of his tendency to carry on the sense of a phrase from line to line without a break, making the stop in the middle of the line, not at the end. It is a trick of style which Browning used effectively, but over which Rossetti never seemed to gain full mastery. It is in verse xvii that the greatest difference is seen between the two editions : the earlier form, in its concluding lines :

May the close lips that knew not prayer  
Praise ever, though they would ?

recalls Mrs. Browning's "Cry of the Human"—

And lips say "God be pitiful,"  
Who ne'er said "God be praised !"

In the later, Rossetti strikes a deeper note than is usual with him, in the earthly lover's passionate question :

Shall God lift  
To endless unity  
The soul whose likeness with thy soul  
Was but its love for thee ?

To those who remember the pathetic drama of his long engagement and short married life,  
38



## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

his devotion to his bride, and his overwhelming grief at her early death, it is significant rather than strange to note the fact that the later form of verse xvii was added after his wife's death. Besides many verbal changes, is there not also, throughout the poem, a subtle difference between the two forms? The "gentle-mouthed" "new friends" who play their "holy games," and greet one another with names "chaste" and "virginal," have become the "lovers, newly met 'mid deathless love's acclaims"; and the names by which they know each other are the old "heart-remembered names" of earth, now brought to be sanctified, along with all other attributes of earthly love, in the perfect Love of Heaven. And when the Blessed Damozel pictures her own petition before the Throne, surely there is the same difference? At first she rises no higher than to beg the gift of "peace," that peace they shared once on earth, than which she then knew no more. But afterwards her knowledge is fuller, the old peace no longer satisfies; it is the "Love" she now offers again, that which had been the best earth had to give, and on which she now asks for the seal of Heaven's Eternity.

The change seems there, for those with eyes to read it, and it accords well with Rossetti's life-story; for the earlier form of "The Blessed Damozel" was written for a family magazine before he was nineteen, but by the time the latest form appeared he was a man of forty-two, and the MS. leaves on which the



## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

first poem was inscribed had already lain for seven years, buried in the Highgate Cemetery, in the coffin of his wife.

### III

**T**HE third number of "The Germ" appeared in March, but already its continuation was uncertain, a sure sign of which being its change of name. It was now called "Art and Poetry : Being thoughts towards Nature. Conducted principally by Artists." Under this more imposing and descriptive title the rest of its brief course was run ; but it is significant that in tradition it lives always only as "The Germ."

Number III contained two poems by Rossetti, both of which had been written during the preceding year, when he was taking one of his few Continental trips with his friend Mr. Holman Hunt. In the later editions of his poems these appear severally as lyrics, "Antwerp and Bruges," and "The Sea-Limits." In their first form they are called respectively "The Carillon" and "From the Cliffs : Noon" ; the second is an irregular sonnet. The minute detail in "The Carillon," even to the note below its title, shows strict adherence to the Pre-Raphaelite principles, and the poem is specially interesting as enabling us to follow the thoughts on his travels of this very little-travelled poet.

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

## THE CARILLON [ANTWERP AND BRUGES]

In these and others of the Flemish towns, the "Carillons" or chimes, which have a most fantastic and delicate music, are played almost continually. The custom is very ancient.

At Antwerp there is a low wall  
    Binding the city, and a moat  
    Beneath, that the wind keeps afloat.  
You pass the gates in a slow drawl  
Of wheels. If it is warm at all  
    The Carillon will give you thought.

I climbed the stair in Antwerp church,  
    What time the urgent weight of sound  
    At sunset seems to heave it round.  
Far up, the Carillon did search  
The wind ; and the birds came to perch  
    Far under, where the gables wound.

In Antwerp harbour on the Scheldt  
    I stood along, a certain space  
    Of night. The mist was near my face :  
Deep on, the flow was heard and felt.  
The Carillon kept pause, and dwelt  
    In music through the silent place.

At Bruges, when you leave the train,  
    A singing numbness in your eyes,—  
    The Carillon's first sound appears  
Only the inner moil. Again  
A little minute though—your brain  
    Takes quiet, and the whole sense hears.

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

John Memmeling and John Van Eyck  
Hold state at Bruges. In sore shame  
I scanned the works that keep their name.  
The Carillon, which then did strike  
Mine ears, was heard of theirs alike :  
It set me closer unto them.

I climbed at Bruges all the flight  
The Belfry has of ancient stone.  
For leagues I saw the east wind blown :  
The earth was grey, the sky was white.  
I stood so near upon the height  
That my flesh felt the Carillon.

Between the lines of the musical little poem we can catch glimpses of an unusual picture, that of Rossetti as a traveller : we see him in Antwerp Church, on the harbour at night with the salt mists of the Scheldt wrapping him round, trying in Bruges to clear his head from that "singing numbness" of the train journey so as to fill it with the still abiding presence of Memmeling and Van Eyck, and with those Flemish Chimes so constantly in his ears that it is a relief at last to climb the steps of the famous belfry and stand where he feels them one with him in bodily form.

There are only four verses in the later editions of the poem, the first and fourth being omitted : this may be an improvement artistically, but one cannot help prizing the earlier lines for the sake of their little personal touches of travel-talk, the "slow drawl" of the "wheels" as he enters Antwerp, and the

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

vividly accurate description of his feelings in the head when he leaves the train at Bruges !

It may be questioned, perhaps, whether the lyric "The Sea-Limits" is an improvement on the irregular sonnet "From the Cliffs" : it is the first stanza, with its beautiful imagery and the swell of the lines that seems almost that of the sea itself, that strikes the ear in each. Here is the original version :

The sea is in its listless chime :  
Time's lapse it is, made audible,—  
The murmur of the earth's large shell.  
In a sad blueness beyond rhyme  
It ends : sense, without thought, can pass  
No stadium further. Since time was,  
This sound hath told the lapse of time.

No stagnance that death wins,—it hath  
The mournfulness of ancient life,  
Always enduring at dull strife.  
As the world's heart of rest and wrath,  
Its painful pulse is in the sands.  
Last utterly, the whole sky stands,  
Grey and not known, along its path.

In the later edition the first verse is certainly improved by the substitution of "no furlong further" for the somewhat pedantic "no stadium further" in its first appearance. On the other hand, an instance of Rossetti's habit of occasionally sacrificing subtle shades of meaning for the sake of attaining more musical form may be seen in the opening line of verse ii,

## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

where the stiff but pregnant phrase "no stagnance that death wins" drops to the rhythmical but far less expressive words "no quiet, which is death's."

The last number of "The Germ" came out in April; Rossetti contributed to it six sonnets on pictures, the outcome of his visit to Belgium, and also the beautiful little poem called here "Pax Vobis," which was reprinted later as "World's Worth." The changes in the later edition were considerable, and it seems more appropriate to give it here in its original form, dated as it appeared in "The Germ"—Ghent: Church of St. Bavon.

### PAX VOBIS

'Tis of the Father Hilary

He strove, but could not pray : so took  
The darkened stair, where his feet shook  
A sad blind echo. He kept up  
Slowly. 'Twas a chill sway of air  
That autumn noon within the stair,  
Sick, dizzy, like a turning cup.  
His brain perplexed him, void and thin :  
He shut his eyes and felt it spin ;  
The obscure deafness hemmed him in.  
He said : " The air is calm outside."

He leaned into the gallery

Where the chime keeps the night and day :  
It hurt his brain,—he could not pray.  
He had his face upon the stone :  
Deep, 'twixt the narrow shafts, his eye  
Passed all the roofs unto the sky



# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

Whose greyness the wind swept alone.  
Close by his feet he saw it shake  
With wind in pools that the rains make :  
The ripple set his eyes to ache.  
He said, "Calm hath its peace outside."

He stood within the mystery  
Girding God's blessed Eucharist :  
The organ and the chaunt had ceased :  
A few words paused against his ear,  
Said from the altar : drawn round him,  
The silence was at rest and dim.  
He could not pray. The bell shook clear  
And ceased. All was great awe,—the breath  
Of God in man, that warranteth  
Wholly the inner things of Faith.  
He said : "There is the world outside."

In the later edition the last line of the poem runs :

He said : "O God, my world in Thee !"

But the priest's wistful look toward the "world outside," even from the steps of the altar itself, seem better to express Rossetti's attitude to life at this time than do the calm words of resignation in the later form.

Of the six sonnets on pictures which Rossetti contributed to the last number of "The Germ," two are from Bruges, the other four from Paris. Their titles are as follows :

- I. "A Virgin and Child," by Hans Memmeling ; in the Academy of Bruges.
- II. "A Marriage of St. Katharine," by the



# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

same ; in the Hospital of St. John at Bruges.

III. "A Dance of Nymphs," by Andrea Mantegna ; in the Louvre.

IV. "A Venetian Pastoral," by Giorgione ; in the Louvre.

V. "Angelica rescued from the Sea-Monster," by Ingres ; in the Luxembourg.

VI. The same.

Of these we choose No. III to print in full, not because it is above the others in merit—and it is difficult to place them when their subjects are so different—but because in it we can see most clearly the figure of Rossetti himself standing before the picture in the great gallery of the Louvre, and can follow his mind working out the allegorical thought up to the Pre-Raphaelite suggestion in the last lines.

Below the title of the sonnet comes this note :

\* \* \* It is necessary to mention that this picture would appear to have been in the artist's mind an allegory, which the modern spectator may seek vainly to interpret.

Scarcely, I think ; yet it indeed *may* be

The meaning reached him, when this music  
rang

Sharp through his brain, a distinct rapid pang,  
And he beheld these rocks and that ridg'd sea.

But I believe he just leaned passively,

And felt their hair carried across his face

As each nymph passed him ; nor gave ear to  
trace

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

How many feet ; nor bent assuredly  
His eyes from the blind fixedness of thought  
To see the dancers. It is bitter glad  
Even unto tears. Its meaning filleth it,  
A portion of most secret life : to wit :—  
Each human pulse shall keep the sense it had  
With all, though the mind's labour run to nought.

This is as the sonnet appeared in "The Germ": in the later edition it was called "An Allegorical Dance of Women," and the word "girl" is substituted for nymph ; for that, and other verbal alterations, the reason is not always obvious. These sonnets are specially interesting as showing the author in the unwonted light of a traveller, standing in turn before the great pictures of the Netherlands and of France, weaving his own beautifully coloured thoughts into one garland with the simple, grand beauties of those artists of a bygone age. One cannot help wondering at times what would Rossetti have been had fate, or a little more energy on his own part, extended his travels to Italy. If the Dutch galleries, and those of Paris, produced at once such songs of insight and interpretation, what might not the world have had from him could he but have stood in the picture galleries of Florence or of Rome.

But there was a lighter side to this journey of his with Mr. Holman Hunt, on which it is pleasant to dwell, and of which records remain in his letters to his brother and to various friends. Some of these were addressed to the Pre-Raphaelite Brothers on his own and Mr.

## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

Holman Hunt's behalf, and describe their sight-seeing from day to day, their impressions, and some of the quainter humours of their travels.

From Bruges he sends the Brotherhood a sonnet which he calls "atrocious," evidently written in the train; and which, particularly in the construction of its broken lines, reads rather like Browning gone mad! But so many pictures have been given of Rossetti shrouded in mystery within the artistic gloom of Cheyne Walk that it seems worth while to catch the wholesome impress of his figure once again as he "jolts" along the "foreign rails," and "trundles out of England into France."

### BETWEEN GHENT AND BRUGES

(Wednesday night, October 24)

"Ah yes, exactly so; but when a man  
Has trundled out of England into France  
And half through Belgium, always in this prance  
Of steam, and still has stuck to his first plan—  
Blank verse or sonnets; and as he began  
Would end;—why, even the blankest verse may chance  
To falter in default of circumstance,  
And even the sonnet lack its mystic span.  
Trees will be trees, grass grass, pools merely pools,  
Unto the end of time and Belgium—points  
Of fact which Poets (very abject fools)  
Get scent of—once their epithets grown tame  
And scarce. Even to these foreign rails—my joints  
Begin to find their jolting much the same.

This sonnet, and two of the letters, are given in

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

the "Pre-Raphaelite Diaries and Letters," edited by W. M. Rossetti. We quote a few passages, again with the object of showing the cheerier side of the poet's nature, which perhaps is less remembered than his powers of suffering.

I believe we have seen to-day almost everything very remarkable at Bruges ; but I assure you we shall want to see much of it again. This is a most stunning place, immeasurably the best we have come to. There is a quantity of first-rate architecture, and very little or no Rubens. But by far the best of all are the miraculous works of Memling and Van Eyck. . . . I forgot to mention that Memling's pictures in the Hospital of St. John were presented to the institution by that stunner in return for the care bestowed upon him when he was received here, severely wounded and in great want, after the Battle of Nancy. . . . Before leaving Ghent we visited the great Convent of the town—the Béguinage. It is of a vast extent, containing entire streets and squares of its own. Each nun has a house to herself, over which is written not her name, but that of some saint under whose protection she has been pleased to put it. In some cases where the name was more than usually quaint, we felt disposed to knock at the door and to ask if he was in ; but refrained, as it was rather late, and we feared he might be gone to bed. We witnessed the vesper service, which rather surprised us, as we thought that among the tunes played we could recognize "Jim Crow" and "Nix my Dolly." At the end, each nun finds a kind of towel somewhere, which she folds up and puts on the top of her head ; during the service, a rather sloshy one goes about with a policeman's bull's-eye, collecting coppers. At our entrance and



## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

departure, Hunt dipped his fingers in the holy-water stoup, and commenced some violent gesticulations, which I was obliged to bring to an abrupt conclusion.

We have bought an extraordinary self-concocting coffee-pot for state occasions of the P.R.B. We have likewise purchased a book containing a receipt for raising the Devil, and in Paris a quantity of Gavarni's sketches, which I long to look over with you.

The buoyant good fellowship that breathes throughout these letters is thoroughly characteristic of the writer, and they form a pleasant, homely background for the rich outpourings of his poetical genius by which he led his enthusiastic Brotherhood.

Rossetti's attitude to religion was always one of artistic reverence that was almost adoration, although he belonged to no special creed. He was not a Catholic, but he was steeped in the traditions of Catholicism in its widest sense, and his religious expression was always nearer to that of our own day than to an age round which Puritan shadows seemed still to linger. An instance of this was his attitude toward the publication later on of the poem "Ave," which was probably written about this time, though not published till 1870. It seems to echo some of his visits to the grand Catholic churches of the Continent, and rings with the simplicity of devotion fitting to such a subject. It is a religious lyric addressed to the Virgin, and forms a meet fellow to his great picture "Ecce Ancilla Domini," begun as an oil-

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

painting in 1850, the year after his tour with Holman Hunt. But his brother mentions with what great hesitation he inserted it in the volume for publication on account of the outlook toward Catholicism which it seems to imply. Rossetti himself writes :

“ I hesitated to print ‘ Ave ’ because of the subject, but I thought it well done, and so included it.” And to those of our own day who search his pages for the somewhat scanty number of poems dealing with religious subjects, there can hardly be any lines which will appeal more than those which picture, with an almost Biblical simplicity, the Mother’s solemn waiting “ in the house of John ” for the return of Him who was at once the Christ-Child and the King.

Mindst thou not (when the twilight gone  
Left darkness in the house of John)  
Between the naked window-bars  
That spacious vigil of the stars ?  
For thou, a watcher even as they,  
Wouldst rise from where throughout the day  
Thou wroughtest raiment for His poor ;  
And finding the fixed terms endure  
Of day and night which never brought  
Sounds of his coming chariot,  
Wouldst lift through cloud-waste unexplor’d  
Those eyes which said, “ How long, O Lord ? ”  
Then that disciple whom He loved,  
Well heeding, haply would be moved  
To ask thy blessing in His name ;  
And that one thought in both, the same



# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

Though silent, then would clasp ye round  
To weep together,—tears long bound,  
Sick tears of patience, dumb and slow.  
Yet, “ Surely I come quickly,”—so  
He said, from life and death gone home.  
Amen : even so, Lord Jesus, come !

To those whose faith is quickened by the re-creation of sacred scenes, there can be few lines more exquisitely satisfying than these. Students who care alike for Rossetti's pictures and his poetry must always associate “ Ave ” with his “ Ecce Ancilla Domini,” which had been completed in March 1850, just before the publication of the last number of “ The Germ.” The face of Mary was that of his sister Christina, the angel Gabriel was founded on that of Woolner. F. G. Stephens thus describes the picture :

In a chamber, whose pure white sides and floor exhibit an intensity of soft morning light, the couch of Mary, itself almost entirely white, is placed close to the wall where dawn would strike its earliest rays, and with its head towards the window. A scanty blue curtain shaded the face of the sleeper ; behind, attached to the wall, a lamp (such as in antique chambers was rarely extinguished, and supposed efficacious against evil spirits) is still alight, although it is broad day without, and the sun reveals the tree growing close to the opening. At the foot of the couch, Mary's embroidery frame, with a lily unfinished on the bright red cloth which was the sole piece of strong colour in the picture, bespeaks one of those

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

domestic occupations painters have agreed to ascribe to the Maiden Mother.

There is the same thought in the line of "Ave":

Thou wroughtest raiment for His poor.

The history of this great picture is significant of the early difficulties which beset the Pre-Raphaelite school of painters, and of the way in which they were overcome. In 1850 the picture was priced at £50, and was returned unsold from the gallery in Regent Street where it had been exhibited. Three years later it was bought for the same sum by Mr. McCracken of Belfast, one of Rossetti's earliest patrons. It was sold after his death, and changed hands more than once: in 1874 it was bought by Mr. William Graham for £388 10s., and lent by him to the Academy Winter Exhibition of 1883, shortly after Rossetti's death. In 1886 it was purchased for the National Gallery of British Art (the Tate Gallery), out of a fund bequeathed by the late John Lucas Walker, for the sum of £840. In the Tate Gallery it is now No. 1210.

In his earlier picture dealing with the same theme, "The Girlhood of Mary Virgin," his sister Christina had also been his model; and his mother had sat for St. Anne. He had worked at it in his old home in Charlotte Street, as is shown by the following entry in the "Journal" of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood for July 1849: "Sunday, 27th. Gabriel and I went in the morning, by appointment, to Dickenson's [Lowes Dickenson], where we met Ford Brown and

## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

Cave Thomas. Dickenson says that, when Cottinham first mentioned to him his intention of buying Gabriel's picture, he descanted glowingly on his genius, and expressed his horror at having 'found him in a garret.' "

To this entry Mr. W. M. Rossetti adds a note :  
" This would be the room appropriated to my brother and myself at the top of our family residence, 50 Charlotte Street, Portland Place. It was certainly an anti-luxurious apartment, but we had, of course, the run of the rest of the house."

The entry and the note form together a good instance of the way in which, by a slightly fanciful colouring, facts may be considerably distorted. Rossetti "in a garret" is doubtless a far more picturesque figure than Rossetti sharing a big upstairs room with his brother in his old home ; but it is pleasant to know which picture is true to life. "The Girlhood of Mary Virgin," his first oil-painting, he sold to the Marchioness Dowager of Bath, in whose family his aunt, Miss Charlotte Polidori, had been governess for some years : so the architect Cottinham's pity for the garret-housed artist did not go the length of making him buy his picture !

## IV

**A**BOUT the year 1850 he left his father's house, where he had been living, while sharing a studio with Madox Brown and Holman Hunt, and took rooms at 14 Chatham Place, Blackfriars : the rooms have since been demolished ; they were situated near the north-east corner of the bridge, and had a fine view over the river. His friendship with the Brownings dates from this period, and the subjects of several of his pictures are to be found in Robert Browning's verse ; among such are " ' Hist ! ' said Kate the Queen," from " Pippa Passes," and " The Laboratory," his first completed water-colour.

After its issue in April 1850, " The Germ " had died, but it had left Rossetti with an established poetical reputation, and it had a brilliant successor in " The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine," which ran throughout the year 1856. The editor was William Fulford ; among his supporters were Burne-Jones, William Morris, and Canon Dixon, all at the time undergraduates, and Rossetti gave them willing help and encouragement. The magazine carried on the doctrines of the Pre-Raphaelite school for the brief year of its existence, and lovers of Rossetti should not fail to make acquaintance with the 776 closely written pages, in double columns, of the now rare volume. It is full of good reading, and contains essays, tales, and poetry, and what are modestly styled



# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

“ notices ” of books ; these comprise good solid reviews of much that is now standard work ; for instance, nineteen pages of double column on Browning's “ Men and Women ” and twenty-six on the third volume of Ruskin's “ Modern Painters.”

As far as Rossetti is concerned, the magazine is of special interest in giving a different opening verse to that usually published in “ The Burden of Nineveh.” The lines are nearer to comic verse than the poet generally allows himself, and show him again as the ironical observer of everyday discomforts he had been while travelling abroad with Holman Hunt ; they also show that he had a rapid succession of correct rhymes to his hand when he cared to use them !

In the magazine, below the title of the poem, comes the heading : “ Burden. ‘ Heavy calamity ; the chorus of a song.’ Dictionary ” ; and then this opening verse :

I have no taste for polyglot :  
At the Museum was my lot,  
Just once, to jot and blot and rot  
In Babel for I know not what.

I went at two, I left at three.  
Round those still floors I tramp'd to win  
By the great porch the dirt and din ;  
And as I made the last door spin  
And issued, they were hoisting in  
A wingèd beast from Nineveh.

The poem had been written about six years before, and there had been some talk of pub-  
56

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

lishing it in a projected journal called "The Pen."

The opening stanza might represent Rossetti himself, with the contrast between his nature and his circumstances ; those "living eyes" that still can see "dead Greece" so plainly through "London dirt and din." He watches the new treasure, "the wingèd beast from Nineveh," carried to its new home in the British Museum, and every detail of the picture is filled in, as he loved to fill it either with pen or brush. "The wingèd beast" rises before our eyes as we read, plain in every point of hoof and flank and human face : we see, as the poet saw, the life of Nineveh re-create itself before us, until this seems

The very corpse of Nineveh.

Jonah, Sardanapalus, Senacherib, Semiramis, rise in turn before us ; then we seem to watch the "wingèd beast" borne to its place in the Museum, and the contrast is overwhelming—almost from the sublime to the ridiculous :

Now, thou poor god, within this hall  
Where the blank windows blind the wall  
From pedestal to pedestal,  
The kind of light shall on thee fall

Which London takes the day to be :  
While school-foundations in the act  
Of holiday, three files compact,  
Shall learn to view thee as a fact  
Connected with that zealous tract :

"Rome,—Babylon and Nineveh."



# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

The glory of the Old World passes again before the poet's view, and he sees the Museum as the resting-place for all that remains of that glory, united here only as relics : the one thing common to the past and the present is " that dumb presence of the sky." He traces the grandeur of those vanished kingdoms, from the Temptation in the Wilderness till the day when our London, with its present wealth and civilization, may have sunk beneath the sway of some Australian kingdom yet to be ; or further still, till a time when the very presence of the Ninevite god may shake the belief of future ages in the Christianity of to-day.

The day when he, Pride's lord and man's,  
Showed all the kingdoms at a glance  
To Him before whose countenance  
The years recede, the years advance,  
And said, " Fall down and worship me " :—  
'Mid all the pomp beneath that look,  
Then stirred there, haply, some rebuke,  
Where to the wind the Salt Pools shook,  
And in those tracts, of life forsook,  
That knew thee not, O Nineveh !

. . . . .

It seemed in one same pageantry  
They followed forms which had been erst ;  
To pass, till on my sight should burst  
That future of the best or worst  
When some may question which was first.  
Of London or of Nineveh.

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

For as that Bull-god once did stand  
And watched the burial-clouds of sand,  
Till these at last without a hand  
Rose o'er his eyes, another land,  
And blinded him with destiny :—  
So may he stand again ; till now,  
In ships of unknown sail and prow,  
Some tribe of the Australian plough  
Bear him afar,—a relic now  
Of London, not of Nineveh !

Or it may chance indeed that when  
Man's age is hoary among men,—  
His centuries threescore and ten,—  
His furthest childhood shall seem then  
More clear than later times may be :  
Who, finding in this desert place  
This form, shall hold us for some race  
That walked not in Christ's lowly ways,  
But bowed its pride and vowed its praise  
Unto the God of Nineveh.

In the last verse we see the poet once more ;  
he smiles, and then comes the thought that  
drives out smiles : he scans again the heavy,  
sculptured sightless figure, and thinks of the  
irony of such an image standing for God to a  
mighty nation.

The smile rose first,—anon drew nigh  
The thought : . . . Those heavy wings spread high,  
So sure of flight, which do not fly ;  
That set gaze never on the sky ;  
Those sculptured flanks it cannot see ;  
Its crown, a brow-contracting load ;

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

Its planted feet which trust the sod : . . .

(So grew the image as I trod :)

O Nineveh, was this thy God,

Thine also, mighty Nineveh ?

R

“ The Blessed Damozel ” was reprinted in “ The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine,” and Rossetti also contributed to it “ Staff and Scrip,” a poem written in modified ballad verse. Of its origin his brother tells us that on September 18, 1849, “ just before starting for the Continent, he wrote to me that he had observed in the ‘ Gesta Romanorum ’ a story, of which he sent me a modified prose version of his own, naming it ‘ The Scrip and Staff ’ : this was the foundation of his poem bearing nearly the same title, and written, I think, not immediately afterwards, but within two or three years ensuing. His letter of September expressed his intention of versifying this tale, and also another story of his own invention, which may, I suppose, have been the ‘ Last Confession.’ ”

“ The Staff and Scrip ” is a poem of mediæval chivalry, and seems to echo Swinburne and William Morris in its rich imagery and high-souled romance. In “ The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine ” it had the following heading, which was, however, omitted in the later editions :

“ How should I your true love know  
From another one ? ”

“ By his cockle hat and staff  
And his sandal-shoon.”

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

The Queen and the Pilgrim come together in the old relation of oppressed and deliverer : he goes to fight her battle against Duke Luke, who has spoiled her lands, and in their first and only meeting the pilgrim recognizes her as the sainted lady of his dreams.

The Queen sat idle by her loom :  
She heard the arras stir,  
And looked up sadly : through the room  
The sweetness sickened her  
Of musk and myrrh.

Her women, standing two and two,  
In silence combed the fleece.  
The Pilgrim said, " Peace be with you,  
Lady " ; and bent his knees.  
She answered, " Peace."

Her eyes were like the wave within ;  
Like water-reeds the poise  
Of her soft body, dainty thin ;  
And like the water's noise  
Her plaintive voice.

For him, the stream had never well'd  
In desert tracts malign  
So sweet ; nor had he ever felt  
So faint in the sunshine  
Of Palestine.

Right so, he knew that he saw weep  
Each night through every dream  
The Queen's own face, confused in sleep  
With visages supreme  
Not known to him.

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

He offers his help against her foe Duke Luke,  
and when she hesitates to link him with her  
fallen fortunes, he urges his claim,

For my vow's sake.

The ballad throughout is mystical ; and to the  
end the exact nature of his vow, which " God  
heard . . . there as here," is never told : it  
seemed to involve the sacrifice of himself to  
her service, and to expect no union between  
them until

Not tithed with days' and years' decease  
He pays thy wage He owed.

The Queen accepts his service, and he goes  
forth to the fight, leaving with " one among her  
train " his staff and scrip to be given her on the  
morrow : he foresaw his fate, and knew it was  
an " in memoriam " gift he sent her. And she  
too sent gifts to her knight, to fit him for the  
morrow's battle—a sword, a banner, and a  
shield.

She sent him a sharp sword, whose belt  
About his body there  
As sweet as her own arms he felt.  
He kissed its blade, all bare,  
Instead of her.

She sent him a green banner wrought  
With one white lily stem,  
To bind his lance with when he fought.  
He writ upon the same  
And kissed her name.



# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

She sent him a white shield, whereon  
She bade that he should trace  
His will. He blent fair hues that shone,  
And in a golden space  
He kissed her face.

Born of the day that died, that eve  
Now dying sank to rest ;  
As he, in likewise taking leave,  
Once with a heaving breast  
Looked to the west.

And there the sunset skies unseal'd,  
Like lands he never knew,  
Beyond to-morrow's battlefield  
Lay open out of view  
To ride into.

Perhaps those last two verses are the most musical in the ballad which Canon Dixon called "the finest of all Rossetti's poems, and one of the most glorious writings in the language. It exhibits," he said, "in flawless perfection the gift that he had above all other writers, absolute beauty and pure action."

And in the story the pale Queen Blanchelys among her maidens awaited the issue of the fight, and performed with them the woman's part of watching, fast, and prayer : the rhythm of the verse seems to catch the quiver of their failing voices :

Weak now to them the voice o' the priest  
As any trance affords ;  
And when each anthem failed and ceas'd,  
It seemed that the last chords  
Still sang the words.



# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

Then came the first signs of the finished fight,  
eagerly reported from maiden to maiden ; and

the Queen held her breath and heard,  
And said, " It is the cry  
Of Victory."

But the price of victory had been heavy :

the horses shook the ground :  
And in the thick of them  
A still band came.

" Oh what do ye bring out of the fight,  
Thus hid beneath these boughs ? "  
" Thy conquering guest returns to-night,  
And yet shall not carouse,  
Queen, in thy house."

" Uncover ye his face," she said.  
" Oh changed in little space ! "  
She cried, " O pale that was so red !  
O God, O God of grace !  
Cover his face."

His sword was broken in his hand  
Where he had kissed the blade.  
" O soft steel that could not withstand !  
O my hard heart unstayed,  
That prayed and prayed ! "

His bloodied banner crossed his mouth  
Where he had kissed her name.  
" O east, and west, and north, and south,  
Fair flew my web, for shame,  
To guide Death's aim ! "

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

The tints were shredded from his shield  
Where he had kissed her face.  
“ Oh, of all gifts that I could yield,  
Death only keeps its place,  
My gift and grace ! ”

Then stepped a damsel to her side,  
And spoke, and needs must weep :  
“ For his sake, lady, if he died,  
He prayed of thee to keep  
This staff and scrip.”

And faithfully she kept them : “ that night  
they hung above her bed,” wet with her tears ;  
and year after year they held their place amid  
the changing scenes of the palace life.

And once she woke with a clear mind  
That letters writ to calm  
Her soul lay in the scrip ; to find  
Only a torpid balm  
And dust of palm.

In the early edition of the poem, in “ The  
Oxford and Cambridge Magazine,” a pretty  
touch of colour is added in the fourth line of that  
verse, which runs there :

Pink shells : a torpid balm.

So she lived her “ Queen’s life,” faithful always  
to his memory, until from her bed’s head, where  
they had hung throughout ten waiting years,  
the Pilgrim’s staff and scrip were brought to  
the chapel and hung above her bier ; for hers is

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

A Queen's death now : as now they shake  
To gusts in chapel dim,—  
Hung where she sleeps, not seen to wake  
(Carved lovely white and slim),  
With them by him.

Stand up to-day, still armed, with her,  
Good knight, before His brow  
Who then as now was here and there,  
Who had in mind thy vow  
Then even as now.

The lists are set in Heaven to-day,  
The bright pavilions shine ;  
Fair hangs thy shield, and none gainsay  
The trumpets sound in sign  
That she is thine.

Not tithed with days' and years' decease  
He pays thy wage He owed,  
But with imperishable peace  
Here in His own abode,  
Thy jealous God.

The poem is mystical to the end : in the story from the "Gesta Romanorum," on which it is founded, and which is called "The Bloody Shirt," the princess who is the heroine has been "stered to synne" by her enemy, before the coming of her champion. But in the "Staff and Scrip" there seems no such suggestion, or it is not made obvious : the two stories resemble one another at the end, and the shirt in the one poem and the staff and scrip in the other hang always above the lady's bed to remind her of

## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

her dead champion, and to keep her faithful to his memory. The verses breathe to the full that pious mysticism which Rossetti, himself an adherent to no creed, had inherited from Italian ancestry, and which made his few poems which deal with religious subjects rise to such a height of devotional fervour.

The "Staff and Scrip" is written in early ballad form, but, unlike "Troy Town" and "Eden Bower," it has no refrain: it probably contains as large a number of faulty rhymes as any one of Rossetti's poems; the arrangement of the rhymes, three and two, lending itself to this defect. "Dream" rhymes to "supreme" and "him"; "fellowship" to "keep" and "scrip"; "stem" to "name"; "ail" to "well"; "yet" to "great"; and "owed" to "God."

### V

**B**ETWEEN the years of "The Germ" and "The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine" Rossetti's reputation as a painter was steadily increasing among those whose judgment was of value. But prices did not run high. In 1853 his staunch Belfast admirer, William McCracken, bought his masterpiece, "Dante on the Anniversary of Beatrice's Death," for the noble sum of £35. It seems to have been about the same time that his famous picture "Found" was begun: this represents a smock-frocked country lover trying

## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

to raise from the ground the beautiful, dishevelled form of his lost love, whose face gleams wan and marred in the early morning light against the wall by which she crouches. The calf in the cart, imprisoned beneath a net, gives an allegorical force to the picture : it was never finished ; Rossetti worked on it, at intervals, almost to the time of his death. At this period of his career his circle of friends was large, and his magnetic personality such that all hailed him as a leader. He kept to the end of his life the great power he had of inspiring affection ; and in his earlier years he was a genial, warm-hearted, sometimes passionate comrade, in a brilliant band of painters, poets, and thinkers. Owing to the hermit-like existence of his later years, due partly to ill-health, he is apt to be remembered rather as an æsthetic recluse, of morbid and unwholesome habits ; but if one would judge a man by what he was in his prime, even if it end prematurely, this was not his real nature. All will agree that there can be no better judge of his aims and character than his brother, who was also his lifelong friend and companion : these are his words, in connexion with some of Rossetti's early letters : " I think the readers will say that, whatever else Dante Rossetti may have been, he was a quick-blooded, downright-speaking man, with plenty of will and an abundant lack of humbug. People who take an interest in him may depend upon it that the more they learn about him—of an authentic kind—the more will the mascu-



## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

line traits of his character appear in evidence, and the less will room be left for the notion of a pallid and anæmic æsthete, a candidate for the sunflowers of a Du Maurier design. He did not 'yearn.' All this is said without at all derogating from the fact that in the very essence of his mind and temperament Dante Rossetti was a poet—a poet who expressed himself in verse and in form and colour." It is possible that some of the strong associations that have clung to Rossetti's memory, of dark rooms, unhealthy habits, and morbid fancies, are due to the fact that his magnetic personality drew to him in later life kindred literary spirits of the day ; and that, as his day waned, they penned their last faithful portraits of him with genius, that sheds a merciless, unblinking light on those last pathetic days, that was never cast on his earlier and more vigorous years.

He cannot be judged merely as an English poet ; though he was born in London and spent his life in England, he was by race three parts Italian, and being painter as well as a poet, he strove to write with the same merciless truth to nature with which he strove to paint : had Robert Buchanan realized Rossetti's genius as a painter, he might have seen in it the explanation of much that offended his dry Scottish susceptibilities, and the fatal article in the "Contemporary Review" might never have seen the light. Hall Caine, one of Rossetti's later friends, said of him that he belonged to Italy, not to England, and to the sixteenth or



## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

even the thirteenth century, rather than the nineteenth ; yet it was not his surroundings that produced this effect, they were British, almost " Cockney " : the glorious insight he showed by pen and brush alike into the spirit of all that Italy has stood for in the past was his by birth, nowhere acquired, nowhere assisted : in hired studios, in his Chelsea house, or among his wild beasts and his sheltering trees, he walked always the same ; a child of the South, who should have lived in the sunshine of that kingdom of Naples whence his father came. When one sees what Italy did for Browning, one cannot but picture what it might have done for Rossetti : his friends tried to send him there, but without success ; he may have dreaded the effect on his own nature of a mere visit there and then the return to England : the fact remains, and it heightens the value of his creative power, that " The Blessed Damozel " was conceived, the " Last Confession " penned, such portraits drawn as " Sister Helen," " Rose Mary," and the women of the sonnets, in no more inspiring atmosphere than that of London smoke and fog.

The figure of the great poet-painter remains perhaps too clearly with us as he was in his later years, worn by suffering, mental and physical ; but we can re-create his portrait in earlier happier years, and see him as he was by nature, cheery, impulsive, and full of quaint humour, in many of his own letters, in those from his friends, and in the pages of the " Pre-

## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

Raphaelite Journal." From such are the following extracts, only a few from the wealth of material to be enjoyed by students at their leisure.

In 1850 Rossetti writes from Sevenoaks to Mr. John Tupper, one of the associates of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, a description of painting in the open air, so vivid and humorous that it is worth inserting as a characteristic production. W. M. Rossetti says : " The subject of my brother's picture was to be ' The Meeting of Dante and Beatrice in the Garden of Eden ' ; but the landscape background which he now painted was finished up years afterwards for a subject of quite another kind, named ' The Bower-meadow.' " After describing to Mr. Tupper his hasty flight from town, Rossetti goes on :

My canvas is a whopper again, more than seven feet long. Ai ! Ai ! Hunt [Holman] gets on swimmingly—yesterday, indeed, a full inch over the ankles : I myself had to sketch under the canopy of heaven, without a hat, and with my umbrella tied over my head to my buttonhole—a position which, will you oblige me by remembering, I expressly desired should be selected for my statue—(N.B. Trousers turned up). This last item is chiefly to suit Woolner's ideas of sculpture, should he get the commission. Stephens, being under a course of philosophy, paints in the house. His band is still, however, an inch or so short of Epicurus's. To-day I began painting on my picture in the park ; and began to profit by the views of the public thereon. One man told another that I was

## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

drawing a map, and analysed my outline to that end. One boy was kicked by another for insulting me by doubting that my landscape was meant for a deer. I saw the back of a pair of top-boots, and a cut-away coat ; Lord Amherst, I was told, was sneaking inside, but he refrained from exposing either his person or his ideas on Art. His house is visited with artists in Egyptian swarms, poor wretch ! Hunt remarked, " How disagreeable to enter one of your rooms for the purpose of delivering a soliloquy ; and find a man there behind an easel," which was bobbish for Hunt.

The cold here is awful when it does not rain, and then the rain is awful. " And what shall guard me but my naked love ? "—and a railway rug. . . .

On January 1, 1853, he writes of his picture " *Ecce Ancilla Domini*," now in the Tate Gallery, to his friend Madox Brown :

This afternoon the blessed white eyesore will be finished. Therefore, if you have any last directions about your pictures now in Green's hands, you had better give them. Yesterday after giving up the angel's head as a bad job (owing to William's malevolent expression), at about one o'clock I took to working it up out of my own intelligence, and got it better by a great deal than it has yet been. I have put a gilt saucer behind his head, which crowns the " China "-ese character of the picture.

It is plain that in his life Rossetti did not lack humour, though little enough of it has clung to his memory, and that for two reasons : one, already stated, the fact that the most life-

## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

like portraits left of him date from his later days, when bad health and consequent bad habits had warped the natural man, and the other that his work in art and poetry aimed at ideals in which humour had no part. But all the more because this is so, should we try in studying Rossetti's life to recall faithfully the impression of what he was in his prime : a genial companion among friends of whom he formed the moving spirit ; one whose jest was heard, and whose laugh rang out even amid the high-souled utterances of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.

His ordinary language had little about it of the languid æsthete : Coventry Patmore's poem in the first number of "The Germ" he describes as "stunning" ; his own ballad, "The King's Tragedy," while in construction, he speaks of as "a ripper" ; he loved the Pre-Raphaelite word "sloshy" for denoting slipshod work ; and nowhere can be found a more charming piece of vigorous English than in his letter to his friend Allingham, the Irish poet, on his difficulty in painting one of the "models" in his great picture "Found."

The letter is dated November 1854, and is written from Finchley.

At present I am hard at work out here on my picture, painting the calf and cart. It has been fine clear weather, though cold, till now, but these two days the rain has set in (for good, I fear), and driven me to my wits' end, as even were I inclined to paint notwith-



## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

standing, the calf would be like a hearth-rug after half an hour's rain ; but I suppose I must turn out to-morrow and try. A very disagreeable part of the business is that I am being obliged to a farmer whom I cannot pay for his trouble in providing calf and all, as he insists on being good-natured. As for the calf, he kicks and fights all the time he remains tied up, which is five or six hours daily, and the view of life induced at his early age by experience in art appears to be so melancholy that he punctually attempts suicide by hanging himself at 3½ daily p.m. At these times I have to cut him down, and then shake him up and lick him like blazes. There is a pleasure in it, my dear fellow : the Smithfield drovers are a kind of opium-eaters at it, but a moderate practitioner might perhaps sustain an argument. I hope soon to be back at my rooms, as I have been quite long enough at my "rhumes." (The above joke did service for MacCrac's benefit last night.)

Many of Rossetti's letters to Allingham, Hall Caine, Madox Brown, and to his family are public property now ; and nowhere can there be better seen, side by side with that creative touch of genius with which he dignified the commonest actions and objects, the honest enjoyment he took in the humorous occurrences of everyday life.

We return to his poetry : it is difficult to date exactly much of his work, especially as he altered and added to his poems to an extent beyond that of most authors.

The influence of his friends Swinburne and Morris is clear in such work as "Staff and

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

Scrip ; ” that of Browning is strongly marked in the long poem, a dramatic monologue in blank verse, “ A Last Confession.”

The story falls here from the dying lips of an Italian patriot, who gasps out his “ last confession ” to the listening priest. It is not of his injuries he thinks, of the wound he gave the Austrian,

whose white coat I still made match  
With his white face, only the two grew red  
As suits his trade.

It is not the approach of death that troubles him, or the dread of mortal pain ; it is the fear lest he will not have strength to make his confession plain ; and so he cries :

Give me a draught of water in that cup ;  
My voice feels thick ; perhaps you do not hear ;  
But you *must* hear. If you mistake my words  
And so absolve me, I am sure the blessing  
Will burn my soul. If you mistake my words  
And so absolve me, Father, the great sin  
Is yours, not mine : mark this : your soul shall burn  
With mine for it.

And then in fevered accents he tells the pathetic tale of his life : how while famine devastated his land, he had found upon the hill-side a baby-girl, whose parents had abandoned her to the death by starvation they could not prevent. Boy as he was, he had accepted the charge, and had taken the child to share his own poor home.



# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

I was young,  
Scarce man then, Father : but the cause  
    which gave  
The wounds I die of now had brought me then  
Some wounds already ; and I lived alone,  
As any hiding hunted man must live.  
It was no easy thing to keep a child  
In safety, for herself it was not safe,  
And doubled my own danger : but I knew  
That God would help me.

Then he goes back to the story of those early days, and their life together among the hills : he tells of his care for her, and of her pretty loving ways, and a forecast of their future rings in one scene that he recalls. He had brought her from the city,

When she was still a merry loving child,—  
The earliest gift I mind my giving her ;  
A little image of a flying Love  
Made of our coloured glass-ware, in his hands  
A dart of gilded metal and a torch.

He dwelt on her pleasure in the toy, her eager, childish questions about it, and her wish to hang it herself upon her chamber wall, “ fronting her little bed ” : so he had held her up in his arms while she drove in the nail with the heavy pruning-hook that did duty as a hammer. Then :

Just as she hung the image on the nail,  
It slipped and all its fragments strewed the ground :  
And as it fell she screamed, for in her hand  
The dart had entered deeply and drawn blood.

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

And so her laughter turned to tears : and Oh !  
I said, the while I bandaged the small hand,  
That I should be the first to make you bleed,  
Who love and love and love you ! kissing still  
The fingers till I got her safe to bed.  
And still she sobbed, Not for the pain at all,  
She said, but for the Love, the poor good Love  
You gave me. So she cried herself to sleep.

The childish memory of the broken image,  
the " poor good Love " that had brought her  
nothing but evil, came back to him now as he  
lay dying, with the priest waiting to give him  
absolution.

His had been the old story : as the waif he  
had saved grew from a merry child to a beautiful  
maiden, so his feeling for her grew from that  
of guardian to lover.

the first love

I had—the father's, brother's love—was changed,  
I think, in some wise ; like a holy thought  
Which is a prayer before one knows of it.

So the great change took place, though out-  
wardly their life ran still in the old groove.

I was a moody comrade to her then,  
For all the love I bore her. Italy,  
The weeping desolate mother, long has claimed  
Her sons' strong arms to lean on, and their hands  
To lop the poisonous thicket from her path,  
Cleaving her way to light. And from her need  
Had grown the fashion of my whole poor life  
Which I was proud to yield her, as my father  
Had yielded his. And this had come to be

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

A game to play, a love to clasp, a hate  
To wreak, all things together that a man  
Needs for his blood to ripen ; till at times  
All else seemed shadows, and I wondered still  
To see such life pass muster and be deemed  
Time's bodily substance. In those hours, no doubt,  
To the young girl my eyes were like my soul,  
Dark wells of death-in-life that yearned for day.  
And though she ruled me always, I remember  
That once when I was thus and she still kept  
Leaping about the place and laughing, I  
Did almost chide her ; whereupon she knelt  
And putting her two hands into my breast  
Sang me a song. Are these tears in my eyes ?  
'Tis long since I have wept for anything.  
I thought that song forgotten out of mind.

But the "rude thing ill-rhymed" comes back and haunts him, with the bitter contrast of the singer then and now.

The words of the girl's love-song are in Italian, and at one time Rossetti thought of omitting them altogether. His brother, in writing of the year 1869, says : "On 26th August he wrote discussing the metre of his Italian song 'La Bella donna' (in the 'Last Confession'); to some laxities in which, as contrary to the scheme of Italian rhythm, I had started an objection. Soon afterwards he decided to cut out this song altogether ; but then again relented, and retained it."

In the poem the dying patriot croons over the soft lilting notes, and sees again the sweet girl singer of those early days ; and the patient priest still waits for the confession.

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

You see I cannot, Father ; I have tried,  
But cannot, as you see. These twenty times  
Beginning, I have come to the same point  
And stopped. Beyond, there are but broken words  
Which will not let you understand my tale.

At last, however, the tale in all its tragedy is told, dropped out painfully, word by word, from the lips of the stricken lover.

As his heart had filled with passionate love, so hers had seemed to grow empty even of her childhood's feeling for him : he seemed powerless to win back even that early affection. So, at last, she had left him ; and he was thankful for the poor promise of one last interview :

so I stood the day her empty heart  
Left her place empty in our home, while yet  
I knew not why she went nor where she went  
Nor how to reach her : so I stood the day  
When to my prayers at last one sight of her  
Was granted, and I looked on heaven made pale  
With scorn, and heard heaven mock me in that laugh.

“ That laugh ” sounds through the poem, even as it sounded in the disordered brain of the dying man, with a haunting cadence of which one cannot miss the significance.

The promised meeting took place upon the hill-side, and he learned that they met only to part—that his faithful, loving devotion raised in her heart no feelings but those of scorn and ridicule.

His eyes, which have watched her from a child, read below the surface : he saw all that



## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

the change in her might come to mean ; he realized the depth to which she might sink, when once rid of his sheltering care. So came the end, inevitable in a nature of Southern passions such as his. He had not sought her empty-handed.

I passed a village fair upon my road,  
And thought, being empty-handed, I would take  
Some little present : such might prove, I said,  
Either a pledge between us, or (God help me !)  
A parting gift. And there it was I bought  
The knife I spoke of, such as women wear.  
That day, three hours afterwards, I found  
For certain, it must be a parting gift.  
And, standing silent now at last, I looked  
Into her scornful face ; and heard the sea  
Still trying hard to din into my ears  
Some speech it knew which still might change her  
heart,  
If only it could make me understand.  
One moment thus. Another, and her face  
Seemed further off than the last line of sea,  
So that I thought, if now she were to speak  
I could not hear her. Then again I knew  
All, as we stood together on the sand  
At Iglio, in the first thin shade o' the hills.  
“ Take it,” I said, and held it out to her,  
While the hilt glanced within my trembling hold ;  
“ Take it and keep it for my sake,” I said.  
Her neck unbent not, neither did her eyes  
Move, nor her foot left beating of the sand ;  
Only she put it by from her and laughed.

It had been the sound of that laugh which had



# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

stung him to madness ; he had caught in it the echo of a worthless woman's laugh, heard at the village fair where he had bought the dagger ; it seemed to his frenzied brain the prophecy, in her own voice, of shame such as that woman's which might be hers in time to come.

She had not left me long ;

But all she might have changed to, or might change to  
(I know nought since—she never speaks a word—)  
Seemed in that laugh. Have I not told you yet,  
Not told you all this time what happened, Father,  
When I had offered her the little knife,  
And bade her keep it for my sake that loved her,  
And she had laughed ? Have I not told you yet ?  
“ Take it,” I said to her the second time,  
“ Take it and keep it.” And then came the fire  
That burnt my hand ; and then the fire was blood,  
And sea and sky were blood and fire, and all  
The day was one red blindness ; till it seemed,  
Within the whirling brain's eclipse, that she  
Or I or all things bled or burned to death.  
And then I found her laid against my feet  
And knew that I had stabbed her, and saw still  
Her look in falling.

But it was not that look of hers that haunted him, even as Desdemona's last look haunted Othello ; it was the echo of the laugh that drove him to the deed.

I shall hear her laugh  
Soon, when she shows the crimson steel to God.

. . . . .

Father, you hear my speech and not her laugh ;  
But God heard that. Will God remember all ?

## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

The poem is the most dramatic of Rossetti's works, and recalls Browning both in story and construction : as in the case of many of Browning's poems, the story is told by the hero, and it is on the elaborate workings of his mind that the interest centres throughout. The girl, the priest, even the figures at the fair, all stand out in clear relief as his thought follows each in turn ; and the action goes backward and forward, in his memory, in point of time, just as is so frequently the case in Browning's dramatic poems.

" The Last Confession " was not published till the volume of " Poems " came out in 1870, but it was begun, at least, almost twenty years before. The story was original, as he said in a letter to his brother in 1849, when he expressed his intention of versifying it.

It is probably to its Italian characters and setting that it owes the fact of being the first of its author's poems to have been translated into Italian. Of the year 1878 W. M. Rossetti writes : " In July Signor Luigi Gamberale sent over from Italy to the author his Italian version of the poem in question, entitled ' Un' Ultima Confessione.' It will be easily understood that this composition, which embodies a story partly (though only subordinately) related to the Italian revolutionary movements which preceded the attainment of national unity, appealed with especial force to an Italian heart and imagination."

## VI

TO this period of Rossetti's work belongs his famous poem "Jenny," akin in subject to his picture "Found." All students should know it, but it does not lend itself to insertion in a work of the present kind. We therefore turn to what is, probably, the best known among his ballads, that of "Sister Helen": once read, it can never be forgotten. In it we realize the truth of Professor Saintsbury's words, "Rossetti is the magician, though his magic is not always easy to spell out." His metre may be at times irregular, and his rhymes faulty, but in such a work as "Sister Helen" the magician's wand is plain.

The poem does not belong to the ordinary form of early ballad, such as "Eden Bridge" or "Troy Town"; it creates, in part at least, its own form, through which it pours forth in lurid streams the very spirit of mediæval mysticism and witchcraft. The haunting sound of the semi-religious refrain; the simple, sad figure of the little brother kept from play to aid his sister's ghastly work; the despairing petitioners who kneel in turn beneath the tower, and go their way, defeated, one by one; above all the character of Helen herself, triumphant in her revenge, pitiless and, at the same time, hopeless—go to make such a whole as English ballad poetry has rarely surpassed.

The scene is laid in Scotland, and deals with

## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

the old superstition of taking your enemy's life by melting his waxen image before the fire.

The opening stanzas, in which the story is made clear, were not part of the original poem. In speaking of the year 1869, W. M. Rossetti writes : " He . . . referred to his having added an opening stanza to ' Sister Helen,' for clearness sake " ; and probably the last letter he ever wrote, on March 5, 1882—he died on the 9th of the following month—to his friend and biographer, Mr. Joseph Knight, relates to further additions to the poem : " In ' Sister Helen ' (which, I remember, you always liked) there is an addition which (though it sounds alarming at first) has quite secured Watts's suffrage." The introduction of Keith of Ewern's newly wedded bride among the suppliants for his life was evidently the change to which he referred, as the verses relating to her do not occur in the edition of 1870, nor does the verse which tells of Keith's sickening :

(Three days ago, on his marriage-morn.)

We quote from the later edition :

" Why did you melt your waxen man,  
Sister Helen ?

To-day is the third since you began."

" The time was long, yet the time ran,  
Little brother."

(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
Three days to-day, between Hell and Heaven !)

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

“ But if you have done your work aright,  
Sister Helen,  
You’ll let me play, for you said I might.”  
“ Be very still in your play to-night,  
Little brother.”

(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
Third night, to-night, between Hell and Heaven !)

“ You said it must melt ere vesper-bell,  
Sister Helen ;  
If now it be molten, all is well.”  
“ Even so,—nay, peace ! you cannot tell,  
Little brother.”

(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
Oh what is this between Hell and Heaven ?)

“ Oh, the waxen knave was plump to-day,  
Sister Helen ;  
How like dead folk he has dropped away ! ”  
“ Nay now, of the dead what can you say,  
Little brother ? ”

(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
What of the dead, between Hell and Heaven ?)

“ See, see, the sunken pile of wood,  
Sister Helen,  
Shines through the thinned wax red as blood ! ”  
“ Nay now, when looked you yet on blood,  
Little brother ? ”

(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
How pale she is, between Hell and Heaven !)

Then the sister, worn out with her ghastly  
work, sinks to rest upon the ground ; and the  
faithful little brother climbs the balcony and



# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

becomes a veritable Sister Ann, to report the approach of all who seek the tower.

But it is Sister Helen herself who is the first to catch the sound of horsemen in the distance,

“ Three horsemen that ride terribly,”

and one outrides the other two, and gains the tower alone.

“ Oh ! it's Keith of Eastholm rides so fast,  
Sister Helen,

For I know the white mane on the blast.”

“ The hour has come, has come at last,  
Little brother ! ”

(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
Her hour at last, between Hell and Heaven !)

“ The wind is loud, but I hear him cry,  
Sister Helen,

That Keith of Ewern's like to die.”

“ And he and thou, and thou and I,  
Little brother.”

(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
And they and we, between Hell and Heaven !)

“ Three days ago, on his marriage-morn,  
Sister Helen,

He sickened, and lies since then forlorn.”

“ For bridegroom's side is the bride a thorn,  
Little brother ? ”

(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
Cold bridal cheer, between Hell and Heaven !)

“ Three days and nights he has lain abed,  
Sister Helen,

And he prays in torment to be dead.”

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

“ The thing may chance, if he have prayed,  
Little brother ! ”

(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
If he have prayed, between Hell and Heaven !)

“ But he has not ceased to cry to-day,  
Sister Helen,  
That you should take your curse away.”

“ My prayer was heard,—he need but pray,  
Little brother ! ”

(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
Shall God not hear, between Hell and Heaven !)

“ But he says, till you take back your ban,  
Sister Helen,  
His soul would pass, yet never can.”

“ Nay then, shall I slay a living man,  
Little brother ? ”

(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
A living soul, between Hell and Heaven !)

“ But he calls for ever on your name,  
Sister Helen,  
And says that he melts before a flame.”

“ My heart for his pleasure fared the same,  
Little brother.”

(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
Fire at the heart, between Hell and Heaven !)

Then comes the second brother, Keith of Westholm, with his “ white plume on the blast ” : he tells the same awful tale and prays the same prayer, only to be met by the pitiless refrain,

Love turned to hate, between Hell and Heaven !

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

And now the pathetic figure of the Chief himself, Keith of Keith, kneels below the balcony, and his broken voice begs for his son's pardon, that at last the soul may depart in peace.

“ Oh, it's Keith of Keith now that rides fast,  
Sister Helen,

For I know the white hair on the blast.”

“ The short, short hour will soon be past,  
Little brother ! ”

(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
Will soon be past, between Hell and Heaven !)

“ He looks at me and he tries to speak,  
Sister Helen,

But oh ! his voice is sad and weak ! ”

“ What here should the mighty Baron seek,  
Little brother ? ”

(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
Is this the end, between Hell and Heaven ?)

“ Oh his son still cries, if you forgive,  
Sister Helen,

The body dies but the soul shall live.”

“ Fire shall forgive me as I forgive,  
Little brother ! ”

(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
As she forgives, between Hell and Heaven !)

“ Oh, he prays you, as his heart would rive,  
Sister Helen,

To save his dear son's soul alive.”

“ Fire cannot slay it, it shall thrive,  
Little brother ! ”

(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
Alas, alas, between Hell and Heaven !)

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

“ He cries to you, kneeling in the road,  
Sister Helen,  
To go with him for the love of God ! ”

“ The way is long to his son’s abode,  
Little brother.”

(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
The way is long, between Hell and Heaven !)

Then, when the father’s prayer is refused,  
last of all comes Helen’s own supplanter, the  
three days’ bride, the golden-haired Lady of  
Ewern ; and Helen’s awful triumph is complete.

“ Pale, pale her cheeks, that in pride did glow,  
Sister Helen,

’Neath the bridal-wreath three days ago.”

“ One morn for pride and three days for woe,  
Little brother ! ”

(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
Three days, three nights, between Hell and Heaven !)

“ Her clasped hands stretch from her bending head,  
Sister Helen ;

With the loud wind’s wail her sobs are wed.”

“ What wedding-strains hath her bridal-bed,  
Little brother ? ”

(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
What strain but death’s, between Hell and Heaven !)

“ She may not speak, she sinks in a swoon,  
Sister Helen,

She lifts her lips and gasps on the moon.”

“ Oh ! might I but hear her soul’s blithe tune,  
Little brother ! ”

(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
Her woe’s dumb cry, between Hell and Heaven !)

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

But for her, least of all, has Helen no mercy ; so the brothers lift her gently from the snow, and the sad cortège turns and goes back whence it came, leaving the black deed to its consummation.

And, in the presence of the two actors with which the poem opened, so it now closes :

“ See, see, the wax has dropped from its place,

Sister Helen,

And the flames are winning up apace ! ”

“ Yet here they burn but for a space,

Little brother ! ”

(O Mother, Mary Mother,

Here for a space, between Hell and Heaven !)

“ Ah ! what white thing at the door has cross'd,

Sister Helen ?

Ah ! what is this that sighs in the frost ? ”

“ A soul that's lost as mine is lost,

Little brother ! ”

(O Mother, Mary Mother,

Lost, lost, all lost, between Hell and Heaven !)

The poem stands alone among English ballads, unclassed and unclassable ; the creation of a genius which knew no school ; breathing in every sombre picture, in every haunting significant refrain, the weird wild spirit of mediæval superstition and revenge. Perhaps one of the minor details in Buchanan's attack on Rossetti in the “ Contemporary Review ” in 1871, which shows most plainly his absolute failure to grasp the real meaning and construction of the

90



# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

"Poems," is that he turns to ridicule the refrain in "Sister Helen" as a piece of mere wordy monotony. To anyone who studies and understands the poem, there can be nothing in it more striking than the way in which those final lines of "Greek Chorus" sum up the awful significance of each verse in turn, till they end in the inevitable wail of despair of the final line :

Lost, lost, all lost, between Hell and Heaven !

## VII

From the tragic story of Helen's love we turn to a love-story also tragic in its kind, that of the poet himself. About the year 1850 Rossetti first met the lady destined to become his wife, Miss Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal. She was the daughter of Charles Siddal, a cutler of Sheffield, and when Rossetti first made her acquaintance she was employed in London as a milliner's assistant. The pure calm beauty of her face, in its wonderful setting of copper-coloured hair, first attracted him ; and that beauty is known to all by the many portraits he has left of her in his pictures, of which the best known perhaps is the "Beata Beatrix," now in the Tate Gallery. She became at first his model, and shortly his pupil, for she was herself an artist of no mean order ; and Rossetti, who thought highly of her work, always encouraged her with the generous appre-

## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

ciation he was so ready to bestow on fellow artists. Their love-story is known to all, their unity of interests, and their devotion, darkened always by the shadow of consumption, which threatened her life throughout the whole of their long engagement. Rossetti was a poor man, and health and finance alike combined against their union, which did not take place till ten years after their first meeting : those years were filled with mixed sunshine and shadows, as many of the references to Miss Siddall in his letters show.

On August 25, 1853, he wrote to Mr. Madox Brown, after Miss Siddal had been engaged on a water-colour portrait of Tennyson : " Lizzy has made a perfect wonder of her portrait, which is nearly done, and which I think we shall send to the Winter Exhibition. She has been very ill, though, lately." On March 30, 1854, he wrote to the same friend : " Lizzy has been very unwell lately. I have introduced her to the Howitts, and we have spent several evenings there. They are quite fond of her, and most delighted with her productions. I have also brought her and my sister Christina together, as our family are now in London again.

" The Howitts insisted on Lizzy's seeing a Dr. Wilkinson [an eminent homœopathist of the day], a friend of theirs, and I believe an eminent man. He finds that the poor dear has contracted a curvature of the spine, and says she ought not to paint at present " ; with charac-

## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

teristic disregard of health, he added, "but this, of course, she must."

On January 23, 1855, in a letter to William Allingham he mentioned a friend of theirs being ordered to Rome for her health; and added, "I wish there were any Rome for my good pupil, whose life might matter a little. She bears the cold weather, however, on the whole, better than I looked for, and of course progresses always as an artist. She is now doing two lovely water-colours (from 'We are Seven' and 'La Belle Dame sans merci')—having found herself always thrown back for lack of health and wealth in the attempts she had made to begin a picture." "Thrown back for lack of health and wealth" sums up the darker side of the lives of these gifted lovers.

Ruskin's recognition of Miss Siddal's powers was a great pleasure to Rossetti, who wrote to Allingham a few months after the last letter: "About a week ago Ruskin saw and bought on the spot every scrap of designs hitherto produced by Miss Siddal. He declared that they were far better than mine, or almost than anyone's, and seemed quite wild with delight at getting them. He asked me to name a price for them, after asking and hearing that they were for sale; and I, of course, considering the immense advantage of getting them into his hands, named a very low price, £25, which he declared to be too low even for a low price, and increased to £30. He is going to have them splendidly mounted and bound

## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

together in gold ; and no doubt this will be a real opening for her, as it is already a great assistance and encouragement." It is characteristic of the eagerness of his nature, and the place which Art always held with him, that his anxiety about Miss Siddal's health seemed subordinate to his longing for her artistic recognition. His whole-hearted appreciation of her work, and the picture of their life together, painting side by side, cannot but remind us of two of their most gifted contemporaries to whom Rossetti makes a charmingly quaint allusion in another of his letters to Allingham, dated 1856 : " The Brownings are long gone back now, and with them one of my delights—an evening resort where I never felt unhappy. How large a part of the real world, I wonder, are those two small people ?—taking meanwhile so little room in any railway carriage, and hardly needing a double bed at the inn."

Rossetti writes constantly of Miss Siddal to his family and his friends, usually as Lizzie or Liz, sometimes by the playful pet name Guggum, and that at times abbreviated to G. ; but the shadow of her delicacy, which shortened their married life, darkened the whole of their long engagement.

In the course of 1860 the wedding was at length fixed, but even then it had to be twice postponed, owing to the illness of the bride. They were married on May 23 of that year, in St. Clement's Church, Hastings, and the same day Rossetti wrote to Madox Brown, " All hail



## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

from Lizzie and myself, just back from church." They made a tour in France and Belgium, and then returned to the lodgings in Blackfriars, which had been prepared for the coming of the bride. Their married life ran out its brief and tragic course within two years. A dead baby was born in March 1861, and the mother's health failed rapidly. The form of consumption from which she suffered brought with it violent pain, and to relieve this she had recourse to laudanum. She died from an overdose of the drug in February 1862, after an engagement of nearly ten years and a married life of less than two.

The tragic scene over her dead body is known to all. Rossetti's passion of grief was added to by the feelings of remorse inevitable in such a nature as his. He came to her, as she lay in her coffin, bringing in his hand the little volume into which, at her bidding, he had copied his poems. They were hers, he said, they had been written for her, and she must take them with her; and he laid the book beside the beautiful face he had so often painted, and they were buried together.

Some of these poems, as already mentioned, had been published in magazines, but of many no second copy existed; and for seven years they lay in the grave in Highgate Cemetery, while Rossetti seemed to give up writing altogether and to devote himself exclusively to painting. Much of his best artistic work belongs to these years: of his famous picture,



# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

the "Beata Beatrix," W. M. Rossetti writes :  
"It represents Beatrice in a semi-supernatural trance, ominous and symbolic of death, but not in any sense dead ; and was painted some while after the death of my brother's wife, probably beginning in 1863, with portraiture so faithfully reminiscent that one might almost say she sat, in spirit and to the mind's eye, for the face."

It is far more difficult to fix the dates of Rossetti's poems than of his pictures ; and the fact that he frequently remodelled them, changed some stanzas and added others dealing with later events, often prevents the possibility of fixing their dates by internal evidence. "The Portrait," for instance, contains obvious allusions to the memory of his wife, but the original poem was one of those buried with her. We insert it in full.

This is her picture as she was :

It seems a thing to wonder on,  
As though mine image in the glass  
Should tarry when myself am gone.

I gaze until she seems to stir,—  
Until mine eyes almost aver

That now, even now, the sweet lips part  
To breathe the words of the sweet heart:  
And yet the earth is over her.

Alas ! even such the thin-drawn ray  
That makes the prison-depths more rude,  
The drip of water night and day  
Giving a tongue to solitude.

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

Yet only this, of love's whole prize,  
Remains ; save what in mournful guise  
Takes counsel with my soul alone,—  
Save what is secret and unknown,  
Below the earth, above the skies.

In painting her I shrined her face  
'Mid mystic trees, where light falls in  
Hardly at all ; a covert place  
Where you might think to find a din  
Of doubtful talk, and a live flame  
Wandering, and many a shape whose name  
Not itself knoweth, and old dew,  
And your own footsteps meeting you,  
And all things going as they came.

A deep dim wood ; and there she stands  
As in that wood that day : for so  
Was the still movement of her hands  
And such the pure line's gracious flow.  
And passing fair the type must seem,  
Unknown the presence and the dream.  
'Tis she : though of herself, alas !  
Less than her shadow on the grass  
Or than her image in the stream.

That day we met there, I and she  
One with the other all alone ;  
And we were blithe, yet memory  
Saddens those hours, as when the moon  
Looks upon daylight. And with her  
I stooped to drink the spring-water,  
Athirst where other waters sprang :  
And where the echo is, she sang,—  
My soul another echo there.

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

But when that hour my soul won strength  
For words whose silence wastes and kills,  
Dull raindrops smote us, and at length  
Thundered the heat within the hills.  
That eve I spoke those words again  
Beside the pelted window-pane ;  
And there she hearkened what I said,  
With under-glances that surveyed  
The empty pastures blind with rain.

Next day the memories of these things,  
Like leaves through which a bird has flown,  
Still vibrated with Love's warm wings ;  
Till I must make them all my own  
And paint this picture. So, 'twixt ease  
Of talk and sweet long silences,  
She stood among the plants in bloom  
At windows of a summer room,  
To feign the shadow of the trees.

And as I wrought, while all above  
And all around was fragrant air,  
In the sick burthen of my love  
It seemed each sun-thrilled blossom there  
Beat like a heart among the leaves.  
O heart that never beats nor heaves,  
In that one darkness lying still,  
What now to thee my love's great will  
Or the fine web the sunshine weaves ?

For now doth daylight disavow  
Those days—nought left to see or hear.  
Only in solemn whispers now  
At night-time these things reach mine ear ;

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

When the leaf-shadows at a breath  
Shrink in the road, and all the heath,  
    Forest and water, far and wide,  
    In limpid starlight glorified,  
Lie like the mystery of death.

Last night at last I could have slept,  
    And yet delayed my sleep till dawn,  
Still wandering. Then it was I wept :  
    For unawares I came upon  
Those glades where once she walked with me :  
And as I stood there suddenly,  
    All wan with traversing the night,  
    Upon the desolate verge of light  
Yearned loud the iron-bosomed sea.

Even so, where Heaven holds breath and hears  
    The beating heart of Love's own breast,  
Where round the secret of all spheres  
    All angels lay their wings to rest,—  
How shall my soul stand rapt and awed,  
When, by the new birth borne abroad  
    Throughout the music of the suns,  
    It enters in her soul at once  
And knows the silence there for God !

Here with her face doth memory sit  
    Meanwhile, and wait the day's decline,  
Till other eyes shall look from it,  
    Eyes of the spirit's Palestine,  
Even than the old gaze tenderer :  
While hopes and aims long lost with her  
    Stand round her image side by side,  
    Like tombs of pilgrims that have died  
About the Holy Sepulchre.

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

One sees in this poem with what a master-hand Rossetti could fit his garland woven once for an imaginary head, to one which was not imaginary. The lines are full of his wife's memory, and of their life together. Mr. Knight has cleverly suggested the identity of the scene touched on in verse vi with that of a stormy afternoon in April 1854, when Rossetti and Miss Siddal sheltered together from the rain in a farmhouse near Hastings, and carved their monograms upon the window panel. In verse iv, lines 3 and 4 specially reproduce the charm of Miss Siddal's beauty, and they could only have been penned by an artist; while in the last verse but one he seems to return for comfort to his own creation of earlier days, and more than one echo comes to us from the Heaven of the "Blessed Damozel."

## VIII

**S**OON after his wife's death Rossetti left the house in Blackfriars, and removed, after a short interval, to No. 16 Cheyne Walk, with which his memory will be always associated. For a little while he shared the house with his brother, Swinburne, and George Meredith, but this arrangement did not last long. Meredith left first, then Swinburne; W. M. Rossetti stayed on until his marriage in 1874.

Swinburne's acquaintance Rossetti had made in Oxford in 1857, while he was painting the



## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

frescoes there for the "Union" which were to illustrate scenes from the "Morte d'Arthur." Many of his friendships dated from that time, when Morris, Burne-Jones, and Val Prinsep were among his fellow enthusiasts; and the fact that the walls of the "Union" were not fit for the work, being new and unprepared, and that the priceless pictures—painted for love, not money—peeled away and are now unrecognizable, is another of the many disappointing little incidents in Rossetti's life.

Besides the house in Cheyne Walk he shared Kelmscott Manor, near Lechlade, for some time as a country residence with William Morris, and he also paid visits among his friends in Scotland and elsewhere. There have been so many descriptions given of 16 Cheyne Walk, its artistic but gloomily furnished chambers, and its oddly stocked garden, that one more seems unnecessary. It is in those surroundings that his figure has grown to be most familiar. The house was old and handsome, and Rossetti filled it with priceless treasures in furniture, pottery, and bronzes. There he would sit among his friends, at the dinners when he made a most genial host, surrounded by wonders of Japanese and Chinese art, old oak, blue china, and fine old metalwork of many kinds. And later on, in the studio, he would charm the same friends with that vivid personal magnetism of which he was possessed, and which drew men to lavish on him deep and ungrudging love. The beauty of his voice and the power of his recitation were

## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

among his noted personal gifts, and he would lie full length on a sofa in his studio, surrounded by his pictures and his friends, and repeat his own ballads, or those of other poets, giving always generous appreciation to the work of his fellow bards.

A fine trait in his character was his recognition of good work by others, and in this he always showed a ready insight. The story of his discovery in 1860 of FitzGerald's hitherto neglected masterpiece "Omar Khayyám" is well known ; we give it in Swinburne's words : " Two friends of Rossetti's—Mr. Whitley Stokes and Mr. Ormsby—told him (he told me) of this wonderful little pamphlet for sale on a stall in St. Martin's Lane, to which Mr. Quaritch, finding that the British public unanimously declined to give a shilling for it, had relegated it to be disposed of for a penny. Having read it, Rossetti and I invested upwards of sixpence apiece—or possibly threepence, I would not wish to exaggerate our extravagance—in copies at that not exorbitant price. Next day we thought we might get some more for presents among our friends, but the man at the stall asked twopence ! Rossetti expostulated with him in terms of such humorously indignant remonstrance as none but he could ever have commanded. We took a few, and left him. In a week or two, if I am not much mistaken, the remaining copies were sold at a guinea ; I have since—as I dare say you have—seen copies offered for still more absurd prices. I kept my

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

pennyworth (the tidiest copy of the lot), and have it still."

Rossetti loved pets, and strange beasts dwelt in that shady garden on the Chelsea Embankment. There were two kangaroos, a peacock which screeched itself to liberty through the complaints of the neighbours, a beautiful fallow deer, two wandering and mischievous armadillos, and a snarling, ill-tempered racoon whom Rossetti would show off, holding him by the scruff of the neck and asking, "Does it not look like a devil?" Among these queer creatures the poet would wander contentedly, exhibiting them to his friends and expatiating on their various beauties. Of the zebu, a wild little fellow about the size of a small Shetland pony, the only tale is told in which the master fared ill among his beasts: according to Whistler, the zebu once caused Rossetti to run, and might have done him serious harm had not its efforts been luckily hampered by the tree to which it had been tethered, and which it had uprooted in its frantic efforts to attack its master. Another of his pets was the godly minded parrot who sat beside him one Sunday morning while the bells of St. Luke's Church rang for service, and suddenly adjured his master, "You ought to be in church now!"

Many of his best-known pictures, both in oil and water-colour, date from Rossetti's residence in Cheyne Walk: he would keep pictures on hand for years, just as he did with many of his poems, and would touch and retouch them in

## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

the same way ; he would also work over and over again at the same subject, as in the case of his pictures on " Mary Magdalene at the door of Simon the Pharisee " and " Found," of which he planned the subject in the year 1853, and at which he was still working shortly before his death. One of the subjects on which he both painted and wrote was " Lilith," the snake-like woman, the legendary first wife of Adam. The rather uncanny mysticism of the legend was just such as would appeal to him, but there is little connexion between Lilith's figure in his two poems and the golden-haired lady whom he painted both in oil and water-colour. In the volume of 1870, among the Sonnets for Pictures, appeared that entitled " Lilith " : it reappeared in the later editions of his works under the name " Body's Beauty," No. LXXVIII in " The House of Life." There is only one change in the later form, that of " web " instead of " net " in line 6, an obvious improvement both in sense and sound.

Of Adam's first wife, Lilith, it is told  
    (The witch he loved before the gift of Eve)  
That, ere the snake's, her sweet tongue could deceive,  
And still she sits, young while the earth is old,  
And, subtly of herself contemplative,  
Draws men to watch the bright web she can weave,  
Till heart and body and life are in its hold.

The rose and poppy are her flowers ; for where  
    Is he not found, O Lilith, whom shed scent  
And soft-shed kisses and soft sleep shall snare ?



# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

Lo ! as that youth's eyes burned at thine, so went  
Thy spell through him, and left his straight neck  
bent

And round his heart one strangling golden hair.

Lilith's snake-like form seems to coil in every line of the sonnet, and leaves one with almost a feeling of suffocation at the imagery of the last line.

The poem "Eden Bower," written in early ballad form, with a simple refrain after the first line of each verse, gives the whole legend with the minute care for detail beloved by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.

It was Lilith the wife of Adam :

*(Sing Eden Bower !)*

Not a drop of her blood was human,  
But she was made like a soft sweet woman.

Lilith stood on the skirts of Eden ;

*(Alas the hour !)*

She was the first that thence was driven ;  
With her was hell and with Eve was heaven.

In the ear of the snake said Lilith :

*(Sing Eden Bower !)*

" To thee I come when the rest is over ;  
A snake was I when thou wast my lover.

" I was the fairest snake in Eden.

*(Alas the hour !)*

By the earth's will, new form and feature  
Made me a wife for the earth's new creature."



## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

Thus she cries to her old lover, as she comes back from the side of Adam whom she has lost : she looks again on their joys together in Eden ; and she calls on the mighty serpent, " the King-snake of Eden," to help her in avenging herself for all she has forfeited.

" Help, sweet Snake, sweet lover of Lilith !

*(Alas the hour !)*

And let God learn how I loved and hated  
Man in the image of God created.

" Help me once against Eve and Adam !

*(Sing Eden Bower !)*

Help me once for this one endeavour,  
And then my love shall be thine for ever !

" Strong is God, the fell foe of Lilith :

*(Alas the hour !)*

Nought in heaven or earth may affright Him ;  
But join thou with me and we will smite Him.

" Strong is God, the great God of Eden :

*(Sing Eden Bower !)*

Over all He made He hath power ;  
But lend me thou thy shape for an hour !

" Lend thy shape for the hate of Adam !

*(Sing Eden Bower !)*

That he may wail my joy that forsook him,  
And curse the day when the bride-sleep took him."

Then she unfolds her evil plan : she makes the snake creep close to her, and listen

" And learn what deed remains for our doing.

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

" Thou didst hear when God said to Adam :

*(Sing Eden Bower !)*

' Of all this wealth I have made thee warden ;  
Thou'rt free to eat of the trees of the garden :

" ' Only of one tree eat not in Eden ;

*(Alas the hour !)*

All save one I give to thy free will,  
The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.'

" O my love, come nearer to Lilith !

*(Sing Eden Bower !)*

In thy sweet folds bind me and bend me,  
And let me feel the shape thou shalt lend me.

" In thy shape I'll go back to Eden ;

*(Alas the hour !)*

In these coils that Tree will I grapple,  
And stretch this crowned head forth by the apple."

Then Lilith foretells the scenes in Paradise :  
Eve's temptation, her tempting of Adam, and  
their fall ; God's visit to the garden in the  
evening ; their vain excuses, and their expulsion  
from the paradise into which, through them,  
sin has now entered. There is something akin  
to the grand simplicity of the Bible itself in the  
lines which foretell the Fall of Man. Lilith  
speaks to Eve :

" Nay, but on that great day in Eden,

*(Sing Eden Bower !)*

By the help that in this wise Tree is,  
God knows well ye shall be as He is."

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

"Then Eve shall eat and give unto Adam ;

*(Alas the hour !)*

And then they both shall know they are naked,  
And their hearts ache as my heart hath achèd.

"Ay, let them hide 'mid the trees of Eden,

*(Sing Eden Bower !)*

As in the cool of the day in the garden  
God shall walk without pity or pardon.

"Hear, thou Eve, the man's heart in Adam !

*(Alas the hour !)*

Of his brave words hark to the bravest :—

'This the woman gave that thou gavest.'

"Hear Eve speak, yea list to her, Lilith !

*(Sing Eden Bower !)*

Feast thine heart with words that shall sate it—

'This the serpent gave and I ate it.'

"O proud Eve, cling close to thine Adam,

*(Alas the hour !)*

Driven forth as the beasts of his naming

By the sword that for ever is flaming."

So Lilith, the terrible snake-woman, foretells the Fall of Man ; and then, from the Bible narrative, the ballad passes to a scene which is purely imaginary, that of her reunion with the serpent after her evil purpose has been accomplished. Rossetti gives every detail of the picture, with that perfection of touch which is his alike on page or canvas. Nothing could be more dramatic than the horrible triumph that rings in their cries over Eden and her fallen inmates.

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

“ On that day on the skirts of Eden,  
(*Alas the hour !*)

In thy shape shall I glide back to thee,  
And in my shape for an instant view thee.

“ But when thou’rt thou and Lilith is Lilith,  
(*Sing Eden Bower !*)

In what bliss past hearing and seeing  
Shall each one drink of the other’s being !

“ With cries of ‘ Eve ! ’ and ‘ Eden ! ’ and ‘ Adam ! ’  
(*Alas the hour !*)

How shall we mingle our love’s caresses,  
I in thy coils, and thou in my tresses ?

“ With those names, ye echoes of Eden,  
(*Sing Eden Bower !*)

Fire shall cry from my heart that burneth,—  
‘ Dust he is and to dust returneth ! ’ ”

Then again the scene reverts to the Bible narrative, and each detail is closely followed. Once more is seen “ the garden planted eastward in Eden,” but the river no longer waters the garden, “ thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth,” and the east of the garden is now guarded by the “ flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.”

“ In the planted garden eastward in Eden,  
(*Sing Eden Bower !*)

Where the river goes forth to water the garden,  
The springs shall dry and the soil shall harden.

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

"Yea, where the bride-sleep fell upon Adam,  
(*Alas the hour !*)

None shall hear when the storm-wind whistles  
Through roses choked among thorns and thistles.

"Yea, beside the east-gate of Eden,  
(*Sing Eden Bower !*)

Where God joined them and none might sever,  
The sword turns this way and that for ever.

"What of Adam cast out of Eden ?  
(*Alas the hour !*)

Lo ! with care like a shadow shaken,  
He tills the hard earth whence he was taken.

"What of Eve too, cast out of Eden ?  
(*Sing Eden Bower !*)

Nay, but she, the bride of God's giving,  
Must yet be mother of all men living."

And the ballad ends with a prophecy of the birth of Cain and Abel, and of the terrible part which sin, now born into the world, is to play in their intercourse together.

"The first is Cain and the second Abel :  
(*Sing Eden Bower !*)

The soul of one shall be made thy brother,  
And thy tongue shall lap the blood of the other."  
(*Alas the hour !*)



# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

## IX

**R**OSSETTI was not five-and-thirty when his short married life came to an end ; the early years in the Chelsea house were those of his prime, although few poets produced such flawless work at so early an age as he had done. All know, from his many portraits, his appearance at this time—the great forehead and strongly formed brows, the deep-set grey eyes, the dark curly hair and short beard, and the thick moustache which shaded the mouth. His figure, slender in youth, was at this time inclining to stoutness, much to his own annoyance, but in later years ill-health removed any such tendency : in height he was just under 5 ft. 8 in. His dress was that of the type to which he belonged, and his portraits generally show him clad in a large loose-fitting coat, suitable for work in a studio. It was perhaps unfortunate for him that, much to his own regret, he was never able to become a smoker ; tobacco might have done something to soothe him in the inevitable worries and anxieties of life, which went hardly with such a temperament as his. He was no newspaper reader, and took no part and little interest in contemporary politics, but he was full of interest and generous sympathy for all workers in his own line. He was an enthusiastic though limited reader as regards poets of the past, and his special favourites among them appear in

## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

many of his letters. "You can never say too much about Coleridge for me," he writes to Mr. Hall Caine, "for I worship him on the right side of idolatry." To the same friend he said, "The three greatest imaginations are Shakespeare, Coleridge, and Shelley." Keats he read from boyhood, and of him he wrote that "he was, among all his contemporaries who established their names, the one true heir of Shakespeare." And again he writes of him to Mr. Hall Caine: "Keats hardly died so much too early—not at all if there had been any danger of his taking to the modern habit eventually—treating material as product, and shooting it all out as it comes. Of course, however, he wouldn't; he was getting always choicer and simpler, and my favourite piece in his work is 'La Belle Dame sans Merci'—I suppose about his last."

Rossetti has left records of his admiration for Blake too, and for the ill-fated Chatterton whose poems he had read as a boy. On the other hand, he never fully appreciated Wordsworth, whose mind and methods were too far removed from his own to attract him. Mr. Hall Caine declares that Rossetti frequently said to him, "I grudge Wordsworth every vote he gets"; and that he wrote: "As to Wordsworth, no one regards the great Ode with more special and unique homage than I do, as a thing absolutely alone of its kind among all greatest things. I cannot say that anything else of his with which I have ever been familiar (and I suffer from long

## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

disuse of all familiarity with him) seems at all on a level with this."

The poets of his own day, Tennyson, Browning, Swinburne and the rest, were his friends, and to their work he gave generous and ungrudging admiration. From Browning's poems, as we have noted, he took many subjects for pictures, and it was in Browning's London house that his well-known sketch was taken of Tennyson reading aloud his own poem "Maud." The sketch is reproduced in Dunn's "Recollections of Dante Gabriel Rossetti," with the comment, "Whoever possesses the little sketch ought to prize it very highly." It is sad to follow the fate of the little sketch, which connects three such great names in poetry, and to mark that the sense in which Mr. Dunn's words came true was not by any means that which he anticipated. Rossetti gave the original to Browning, and the "Athenæum" for May 10, 1913, contains the following entry, under the heading "The Browning Sale": "D. G. Rossetti, Pen-and-ink portrait of Tennyson reading 'Maud,' Sept. 27, 1855, £225."

So the years passed on at Cheyne Walk, and Rossetti spent them in hard work and intercourse with his friends. These friends varied at different periods of his life: his friendships were deep and warm, but not always lasting. From both Browning and Ruskin he was estranged in later years; his letters to Allingham came to a somewhat abrupt end, and this was the case with others among his correspon-

## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

dents. He was a man of moods ; of strong emotions and limited interests and outlook, intensely sensitive to misconception and intolerant of all with whom he disagreed. But both his feelings and his friends had united during the last few years in urging him to one important act, that of the recovery of his buried volume of poems. Leave was accordingly obtained from the Home Secretary, Mr. Bruce, to open the coffin of Elizabeth Rossetti ; the poet spent a sorrowful and solemn night while the ceremony was carried out, and the face he had so often painted was once more exposed to view, still beautiful as in life. After treatment by an expert, the volume was placed in Rossetti's hands, and by him prepared for publication with considerable changes and additions.

His publisher, to the end of his life, was Mr. F. S. Ellis, in 1870 of King Street, Covent Garden, and later of New Bond Street ; it is pleasant to recall the testimony Mr. W. M. Rossetti bears as to their relations : " My brother had, from first to last, the utmost reason for satisfaction in having come to terms with Mr. Ellis, who acted with consistent liberality and friendly zeal, and who relieved him from all trouble in the matter more onerous than that of receiving cheques for author's royalty on sales, at punctual intervals."

One memorable feature in Rossetti's life was his warm family affection, and the way that loving sympathy and appreciation from his mother and his gifted brother and sister cheered



## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

him in every phase of his career, and were round him to the end. His father had died in 1854, but to the end of his life he and his son had been on affectionate terms of intimacy. The warm affection existing between the different generations of the family is illustrated in a letter of Gabriele Rossetti's to his son, written a few months before his death : " We shall return to London on the 25th of March, and we return for ever. I trust to find in good health you, my dearest son, and your brother and your sister Maria. And you will rejoice in again seeing dear Christina, and your aged father, who will soon go underground with beloved Polidori. I learned with pleasure that you and William and Maria all assisted at his last moments. Dearest father-in-law and friend, how much I love you ! "

The letter ends : " Be heedful of your profession, dearly beloved son, and let the public see what you are capable of.

" Your loving father,

" GABRIELE ROSSETTI "

It was of his son's pictures the father was thinking when he wrote the last words, but he would have been proud had he lived to see the welcome accorded by the " public " to his son's first volume of poems.

The book appeared in the end of April 1870, and was called simply " Poems " : it was dedicated to his brother. Its success was so immediate that on May 4 Rossetti wrote to his



## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

mother : " Dear Old Darling of 70,—You will be glad to hear that the first edition is almost exhausted, and that Ellis is going to press with the second thousand. It will have brought me £300 in less than a month." The volume ran rapidly through seven editions, and was reviewed with almost unmixed eulogy on every side. Swinburne's enthusiastic praise in the " Fortnightly Review " gave Rossetti especial pleasure.

Some of the poems, as has been mentioned, had already appeared in " The Germ," the " Oxford and Cambridge Magazine," and other periodicals ; but most of these poems were now altered or added to, and many others were published for the first time. Among these was the lyric " Love's Nocturne," which Rossetti had probably offered in early days to Thackeray, the original editor of the " Cornhill Magazine " ; but in that magazine neither this nor any other poem by Rossetti ever appeared. Akin in subject to " Love's Nocturne " is the beautiful little poem " First Love Remembered," which also appeared now for the first time. The arrangement of rhymes in it, which is that of Tennyson's " In Memoriam," is very unusual with this metre. The first and fourth lines rhyme, and the second and third, as in Tennyson's poem ; but, unlike his lines of equal length, the first and the third here contain four feet, the second and the fourth only three.

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

## FIRST LOVE REMEMBERED

Peace in her chamber, wheresoe'er  
It be, a holy place :  
The thought still brings my soul such grace  
As morning meadows wear.

Whether it still be small and light,  
A maid's who dreams alone,  
As from her orchard-gate the moon  
Its ceiling showed at night :

Or whether, in a shadow dense  
As nuptial hymns invoke,  
Innocent maidenhood awoke  
To married innocence.

There still the thanks unheard await  
The unconscious gift bequeathed :  
For there my soul this hour has breathed  
An air inviolate.

“ Love's Nocturne ” is a far more difficult poem : it deals with visions of the night, with the shapes one would fain see in dreams, and those which more often take their place ; in the rush and confusion of its words and images, it seems to catch at times the very spirit of Dreamland itself.

The speaker longs to guide his lady's visions :

Ah ! that from all dreams I might  
Choose one dream and guide its flight !  
I know well  
What her sleep should tell to-night.

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

But that none can do : he dwells on the shapes  
that fill her dreams and his own, and in verses  
that are in themselves dreamlike in their misty  
beauty : while she sleeps

Poets' fancies all are there :  
There the elf-girls flood with wings  
Valleys full of plaintive airs ;  
There breathe perfumes ; there in rings  
Whirl the foam-bewildered springs ;  
Siren there  
Winds her dizzy hair and sings.

What can give better the mysterious sense of  
disappointment in a dream than this verse ?

Reft of her, my dreams are all  
Clammy trance that fears the sky :  
Changing footpaths shift and fall ;  
From polluted coverts nigh,  
Miserable phantoms sigh ;  
Quakes the pall,  
And the funeral goes by.

The poem needs study in order to grasp its full  
meaning ; it contains one specially poor rhyme,  
that of "teeth" to "breathe."

The "Sonnet-Sequence," which appeared in  
the later editions of Rossetti's poems under  
the title "The House of Life," was only  
partially contained in the volume of 1870.  
There it was headed "Sonnets and Songs,  
towards a Work to be called 'The House of  
Life' " : this, in its later form, was confined

## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

to sonnets. Concerning the name Mr. W. M. Rossetti says : " I am not aware that any question has been raised as to the meaning of the title ' The House of Life ' ; nor did I ever hear any explanation of it from my brother. He was fond of anything related to astrology or horoscopy—not indeed that he ever paid the least detailed or practical attention to these obsolete speculations ; and I understand him to use the term ' The House of Life ' as a zodiacal adept uses the term ' the house of Leo.' As the sun is said to be ' in the house of Leo,' so (as I construe it) Rossetti indicates ' Love, Change, and Fate ' as being ' in the House of Life ' ; or, in other words, a Human Life is ruled and pervaded by the triple influence of Love, Change, and Fate." In answer to the charge of obscurity, which has been sometimes brought against these sonnets, Mr. W. M. Rossetti writes : " The sonnets are mostly of the kind which we call ' occasional ' ; some incident happened, or some emotion was dominant, and the author wrote a sonnet regarding it. When a good number had been written, they came to form, if considered collectively, a sort of record of his feelings and experiences, his reading of the problems of life—an inscribed tablet of his mind : then, but not before then, he began marshalling them together, and entitled them. ' The House of Life.' "

The whole idea and arrangement of these sonnets renders quotation difficult : one can but pick out here and there those which illus-

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

trate a special thought, or which seem to answer directly one to another. Such an answer seems to lie in the sonnet numbered XXI in "The House of Life" as it appears in the complete edition, and called "Love Sweetness," to "Lovesight," No. IV.

## LOVESIGHT

When do I see thee most, beloved one ?  
When in the light the spirits of mine eyes  
Before thy face, their altar, solemnize  
The worship of that Love through thee made known ?  
Or when, in the dusk hours, (we two alone,)  
Close-kissed and eloquent of still replies  
Thy twilight-hidden glimmering visage lies,  
And my soul only sees thy soul its own ?

O love, my love ! if I no more should see  
Thyself, nor on the earth the shadow of thee,  
Nor image of thine eyes in any spring,—  
How then should sound upon Life's darkening slope  
The ground-whirl of the perished leaves of Hope,  
The wind of Death's imperishable wing ?

## LOVE-SWEETNESS

Sweet dimness of her loosened hair's downfall  
About thy face ; her sweet hands round thy head  
In gracious fostering union garlanded ;  
Her tremulous smiles ; her glances' sweet recall  
Of love ; her murmuring sighs memorial ;  
Her mouth's culled sweetness by thy kisses shed  
On cheeks and neck and eyelids, and so led  
Back to her mouth which answers there for all :—



# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

What sweeter than these things, except the thing  
In lacking which all these would lose their sweet :—  
The confident heart's still fervour : the swift beat  
And soft subsidence of the spirit's wing,  
Then when it feels, in cloud-girt wayfaring,  
The breath of kindred plumes against its feet ?

Besides their own power and beauty, these sonnets have the added interest that they enable one to trace through their lines Rossetti's thoughts and feelings toward the greatest attributes and events of life. His voice speaks again in "The Monochord" (LXXIX in "The House of Life") of the doubts and terrors both of reality and imagination, through which lay "the road I came"; and, like a trumpet-blast of warning to those who come after him, sound backward out of the darkness the familiar words of "Lost Days" (LXXXVI).

## THE MONOCHORD

Is it this sky's vast vault or ocean's sound  
That is Life's self and draws my life from me,  
And by instinct ineffable decree  
Holds my breath quailing on the bitter bound ?  
Nay, is it Life or Death, thus thunder crown'd,  
That 'mid the tide of all emergency  
Now notes my separate wave, and to what sea  
Its difficult eddies labour in the ground ?

Oh ! what is this that knows the road I came,  
The flame turned cloud, the cloud returned to flame,  
The lifted shifted steeps and all the way ?—

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

That draws round me at last this wind-warm space,  
And in regenerate rapture turns my face  
Upon the devious coverts of dismay ?

## LOST DAYS

The lost days of my life until to-day,  
What were they, could I see them on the street  
Lie as they fell ? Would they be ears of wheat  
Sown once for food but trodden into clay ?  
Or golden coins squandered and still to pay ?  
Or drops of blood dabbling the guilty feet ?  
Or such spilt water as in dreams must cheat  
The undying throats of Hell, athirst alway ?

I do not see them here ; but after death  
God knows I know the faces I shall see,  
Each one a murdered self, with low last breath.  
“ I am thyself,—what hast thou done to me ? ”  
“ And I—and I—thyself,” (lo ! each one saith,)  
“ And thou thyself to all eternity ! ”

Of this “ Sonnet-Sequence ” as a whole Mr. W. M. Rossetti writes : “ There is, I fancy, a prevailing impression that the tone of ‘ The House of Life ’ is one of constant and little-mitigated gloom.” I would venture to say that, if this is the case, such an impression is due to the fact that those sonnets which deal with the sadder side of life and its emotions strike deeper than the corresponding height attained in those dealing with joy and its attributes.

Take, for example, the two sonnets “ Lost on Both Sides ” (XCI) and “ A Superscription ” (XCVII), and compare the sheer depth of suffering which each reveals with the rapture of joy

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

shown in the two already quoted, "Lovesight" and "Love-Sweetness."

## LOST ON BOTH SIDES

As when two men have loved a woman well,  
Each hating each, through Love's and Death's  
deceit ;

Since not for either this stark marriage-sheet  
And the long pauses of this wedding-bell ;  
Yet o'er her grave the night and day dispel  
At last their feud forlorn, with cold and heat ;  
Nor other than dear friends to death may fleet  
The two lives left that most of her can tell :—

So separate hopes, which in a soul had wooed  
The one same Peace, strove with each other long,  
And Peace before their faces perished since :  
So through that soul, in restless brotherhood,  
They roam together now, and wind among  
Its by-streets, knocking at the dusty inns.

## A SUPERScription

Look in my face ; my name is Might-have-been ;  
I am also called No-more, Too-late, Farewell ;  
Unto thine ear I hold the dead-sea shell  
Cast up thy Life's foam-fretted feet between ;  
Unto thine eyes the glass where that is seen  
Which had Life's form and Love's, but by my spell  
Is now a shaken shadow intolerable,  
Of ultimate things unuttered the frail screen.

Mark me, how still I am ! But should there dart  
One moment through thy soul the soft surprise  
Of that winged Peace which lulls the breath of  
sighs,—

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

Then shalt thou see me smile, and turn apart  
Thy visage to mine ambush at thy heart  
Sleepless with cold commemorative eyes.

Perhaps the most characteristic sign of the intensity of this minor note throughout "The House of Life" is in each reference to Hope, so clearly the Hope of Mr. Watts' picture, with all but the last string of the lute snapped. Take the first four lines from "The One Hope" (CI) in the later edition of the poems; sonnet L in that of 1870, from which these lines—slightly altered in the later edition—are quoted:

When all desire at last and all regret  
Go hand in hand to death, and all is vain,  
What shall assuage the unforgotten pain  
And teach the forgetful to forget?

Or take again the wail of the last line in "Hope Overtaken," which did not appear till the later volume:

Alas, cling round me, for the day is done!

But, whatever its limitations, "The House of Life" makes noble reading for those who have eyes to see the mind of which it is an index: the connexion between the various sonnets is not always obvious, but those who care for Rossetti and his work can trace in them every shade of his mind and thought, dealing alike with things bodily, mental, and spiritual.



# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

## X

**I**T was in 1868 that the shadow, never again to be lifted, began to darken Rossetti's life. In August of that year he wrote to Allingham, "I've been very seedy, and still am rather so, but doctors have been doing me some good." According to his brother, even before this date he had begun to be threatened with insomnia, the curse of so many a man of his type. For the relief of this evil, intolerable to one of his restless energy, he had been advised by a friend to use the newly discovered drug chloral, the properties, and specially the after-effects of which, were not at the time fully understood. "My brother," says Mr. W. M. Rossetti, "was one of the men least fitted to try any such experiment with impunity. He began, I understand, with nightly doses of chloral of ten grains. In course of time it got to one hundred and eighty grains!" All know and deplore the fact that the ruin of his brilliant career, the wreck of his life, and his death at the age of 54, were the result of his gradual subjection to the poisonous drug.

But by one of those ironical strokes with which Fate seems often to check the promise of her greatest sons, soon after Rossetti had learned the use of the dangerous narcotic, there occurred the one incident in his life which did most to aggravate his tendency to insomnia, and at the same time to render its horrors most unbearable.



## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

Hitherto, with little exception, the world had honoured him. Except some general criticism of the Pre-Raphaelites, which he had shared with the rest of the Brotherhood, little had been said of his work which he could take amiss. On the publication of the "Poems" in 1870 the same treatment seemed to follow him, and the book met with an enthusiastic and well-merited welcome. But suddenly, from a sky apparently clear, fell a bolt whose power for evil was far greater than anyone could have foreseen. Rossetti was enjoying to the full the eager and appreciative praises which were accorded on all sides to the poems published under such tragic circumstances, when the check came, and the ugly slur was cast upon him which—unjust though it undoubtedly was—proved too much for his highly strung and sensitive nature.

There can be little doubt that his increased sufferings from insomnia, and consequently increased use of the fatal chloral, were largely due to the publication in the October number of the "Contemporary Review" for 1871, of the article styled "The Fleshly School of Poetry." It was signed "Thomas Maitland," but was the work of Robert Buchanan published under a pseudonym, which was unusual in the "Contemporary." It is not possible to discuss here at any length either the article itself, the correspondence to which it led, or Rossetti's answer, "The Stealthy School of Criticism," which appeared soon afterwards in

## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

the "Athenæum." But the drift of the article and its effect on Rossetti are soon stated. It opens by comparing the literary figures of the day to the characters in "Hamlet," and deplores the fact that certain "walking-on gentlemen," to wit Osric, Rosencranz and Guildenstern, for whose parts the author casts respectively Rossetti, Swinburne and Morris, are allowed to make themselves heard above the principal characters. "Hamlet," according to the writer of the article, is played by Tennyson and Browning on alternate nights, Horatio by Matthew Arnold, Voltimand by Bailey, A Gentleman by Robert Lytton, and Cornelius by Buchanan (!). The article is vigorous and ingenious, but the judgments and pronouncements are so extraordinary that one cannot help wondering at even so sensitive a man as Rossetti feeling deeply the utterances of such a critic. Morris is set aside as "glibly imitative," Swinburne as "transcendently superficial." The critic had apparently read both "Sister Helen" and "The Last Confession," and yet said, "Mr. Rossetti is never dramatic." He spoke of the "false and shallow mysticism of 'Eden Bower'"; the "affected rubbish" about "Eden Bower" and "Sister Helen"; the "sad nonsense" or "if not . . . very meretricious affectation" of much of the work; and even sank to the simplest form of adverse criticism, that of calling the poems "trash." Although he wrote anonymously, he introduced himself into the article: "Jenny," he wrote,

## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

“ . . . is a production which bears signs of having been suggested by Mr. Buchanan's quasi-lyrical poems, which it copies in the style and title, and particularly by ‘Artist and Model.’ ”

This point especially irritated Rossetti, whose answer in the “Athenæum” on December 16, 1871, was throughout the utterance of a very angry man : “There is another little charge, however,” he says near the end of his article, “which this minstrel in mufti brings against ‘Jenny,’ namely, one of plagiarism from that very poetic self of his which the tutelary prose does but enshroud for the moment. This question can, fortunately, be settled with ease by others who have read my critic's poems ; and thus I need the less regret that, not happening myself to be in that position, I must be content to rank with those who cannot pretend to an opinion on the subject.” He alludes to the author of the “Contemporary” article as “Mr. Robert-Thomas”—an ironical combination of the real and assumed Christian names—and discusses what he calls “the Siamese aspect of the entertainment provided by the ‘Review,’ ” doubtless an allusion to the Siamese Twins so famous in his day !

On one point the article was undoubtedly just, and that was its criticism on the careless and faulty rhyming of Rossetti and his school ; but the review was unsympathetic from start to finish, besides containing the special attack which made it notorious.

## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

The accusation brought against the author of the "Poems" was that of writing from a moral standpoint which could only be described as corrupt. Swinburne and Morris were included in the charge of having bound themselves by "a solemn league and covenant to extol fleshliness as the distinct and supreme end of poetic and pictorial art ; to aver that poetic expression is greater than poetic thought, and by inference that the body is greater than the soul, and sound superior to sense." That Rossetti was a painter as well as a poet, and so saw the world with the true artist's unsparing fidelity to nature, was never taken into account ; in fact the creator of "Ecce Ancilla Domini," "Beata Beatrix," and "Dante's Dream" was put down as "an artist who conceives unpleasantly and draws ill." "The fleshly school of verse-writers"—so the article goes on—"are, so to speak, public offenders, because they are diligently spreading the seeds of disease broadcast wherever they are read and understood." In the light of their after achievements it is odd to hear Swinburne, Morris, and Rossetti summed up as "the fantastic figures of the fleshly school, with their droll mediæval garments, their funny archaic speech, and the fatal marks of literary consumption in every pale and delicate visage."

To those who have drunk deep draughts of spiritual refreshment from passages in "The Blessed Damozel," "Ave," or "My Sister's Sleep" ; who have been carried back to the simple, mediæval world of passion and action



## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

in the ballads of "Staff and Scrip" and "Eden Bower," or "Sister Helen" with its faithful reproduction of the spirit of early tragedy ; or who have gathered for themselves wise sayings, helpful phrases, and gleams of insight into "that which is invisible" in such sonnets as "The Choice," "Lost Days," or "The Superscription," the accusation brought against Rossetti must always stand as the strongest instance known in literary history of "*Honi soit qui mal y pense.*" Professor Saintsbury, in his recent volume on "The History of English Prosody," gathers up and dismisses the charge in one masterly sentence of his characteristically vigorous English. This is no place for full discussion on either side : our business here is only to mark the sad fact that from the time his reputation received this slur—however unjust it may have been—Rossetti was an altered man. It is easy to say that he took the whole matter too seriously ; that may be so, though as a fact he did, in the beginning, show some amusement at a controversy on the unusual fact of a "*nom-de-plume*" being used by a contributor to the "Contemporary Review." But the article was enlarged and reproduced in pamphlet form, and then it could hardly be taken as anything but serious. A man of another temperament, and one who had been inured earlier to adverse criticism, might have taken the matter differently ; but every man is himself, and must suffer according to his own nature. Rossetti could not have produced



## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

the work he did had he not been capable of shades of feeling far finer than those of ordinary men ; and therefore, in this case, his suffering was proportionately bitter. Nor must it be forgotten that from only one grandparent—his mother's mother—could he have hoped to inherit any of that commodity so useful in times of intolerable strain—British pluck.

The fact remains : the weapon with which the wound had been dealt was poisoned, and in Rossetti's case the poison proved fatal.

His brother says : "He allowed a sense of unfair treatment, and a suspicion that the slur cast upon himself and his writings might be widely accepted as true, to eat into his very vitals, gravely altering his tone of mind and character, his attitude towards the world, and his habits of life." And he goes on to speak of the increased sleeplessness and the reckless use of the chloral, and of the intense mental suffering under the accusation ; and he adds, "all three had their share in making my brother a changed man from 1872 onwards."

In justice to Buchanan, and in proof also that he lived to recognize his mistake, we give here his words of a later date to Mr. Hall Caine : "I make full admission of Rossetti's claims to the purest kind of literary renown, and if I were to criticize his poems now, I should write very differently." The romance, "God and the Man," had been published by Buchanan in 1881, and dedicated to Rossetti in lines entitled, "To an old Enemy."

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

“ I would have snatch'd a bay-leaf from thy brow,  
    Wrongs the chaplet on an honoured head ;  
In peace and charity I bring thee now  
    A lily-flower instead.

Pure as thy purpose, blameless as thy song,  
    Sweet as thy spirit, may this offering be ;  
Forget the bitter blame that did thee wrong,  
    And take the gift from me ! ”

Rossetti was pleased at the dedication, and all that it implied : after his death Buchanan added to it the following verses :

## TO DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI

Calmly thy royal robe of death around thee,  
    Thou sleepest, and weeping brethren round thee  
    stand—  
Gently they placed—ere yet God's angel crown'd thee,  
    My lily in thy hand !

I never knew thee living, O my brother !  
    But on thy breast my lily of love now lies ;  
And by that token, we shall know each other,  
    When God's voice saith, “ Arise ! ”

Beautiful and appropriate as the lines are, they make but one more of the many instances where lilies to grace the dead have proved but a poor compensation for unjust treatment of the living.

From the end of the year 1872, as his brother said, Rossetti was a changed man. He became moody and unsociable, and took to

## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

keeping always later and later hours, and also to following habits which more than ever tended to alienate him from his fellow men. He would walk out but little, and often only after dark, or in his garden, among his strange animals. He dropped many of his old friends, and grew irritable and suspicious even with those for whom he really cared deeply : this change in his genial nature was, of course, the direct effect of the ever-increasing doses of chloral with which he was trying to fight the insomnia fiend.

The "Poems" had been fitly dedicated to his brother, the friend whose whole-hearted sympathy and lifelong interest and companionship had been more than that of an ordinary brother. Partly owing to his failing health, and his consequently unsociable ways and odd habits, some of his friends became estranged from him, but the brother who had shared his boyish efforts in producing the family magazine "Hotchpotch," and had worked with him in the big playroom which Mr. Cottingham had misnamed "a garret," gave him in these now darkening years the same ungrudging comradeship and love. Every week they spent at least one evening together, and both in his painting and his writing his brother was his ever-ready critic. The gatherings of friends in the big studio continued, although the master had lost much of the buoyancy he brought to them in earlier days. But he would still read and recite in the deep rich voice which to the

## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

end was one of his greatest charms, and to the music of which many of those hearers have borne testimony. He still had pleasure in seeing his friends, though the visits he paid to others grew less and less frequent, and his dread of new faces increased as time went on.

For the last years of his life one of his closest friends was Mr. Theodore Watts (now Watts Dunton), whose care and devotion knew no bounds. His friendship with Mr. Hall Caine, though carried on for two years previously by letter, only extended personally over the last two years of his life; but during those two years their intercourse was close and constant, and Mr. Hall Caine's "Recollections" bear their own testimony to the affectionate nature of their relationship to one another.

### XI

**T**HOUGH failing in health, Rossetti never relinquished work, either with brush or pen, during the last years of his life. The account of his pictures must be read elsewhere, and fits in with that of the poems; "The Blessed Damozel" he reproduced more than once in oil or crayon; and a pen-and-ink sketch of "Sister Helen" and a tinted wash of "Troy Town," both owned by his brother, were executed about this time.

"Troy Town" was one of the few poems other than sonnets which he published dealing with a classical subject; it may be that neither



## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

his mind nor methods lent themselves readily to a classical setting, for the ballad lacks the wild beauty and power of "Sister Helen" and the mystic charm of "Eden Bower." "Heaven-born Helen, Sparta's Queen," never seems quite to live before us as does her merciless Scottish namesake, or Lilith the snake-witch of Eden. The single-lined refrain is effective, but that of the couplet ending each verse is hardly so musical as most of the ballad choruses, and strikes the ear at times as almost wooden. The story is that of Helen of Troy suing to Venus for the love of Paris : she brings an offering of a "carven cup," and entreats the goddess by the memory of that judgment of Paris given once long ago in her favour.

"Once an apple stirred the beat  
Of thy heart with the heart's desire :—  
Say, who brought it then to thy feet ?  
*(O Troy's down,  
Tall Troy's on fire !)*

"They that claimed it then were three :  
*(O Troy Town !)*  
For thy sake two hearts did he  
Make forlorn of the heart's desire.  
Do for him as he did for thee ! "  
*(O Troy's down,  
Tall Troy's on fire !)*

Venus looked on Helen's gift,  
*(O Troy Town !)*  
Looked and smiled with subtle drift,



# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

Saw the work of her heart's desire :—  
“ There thou kneel'st for Love to lift ! ”

*(O Troy's down,  
Tall Troy's on fire !)*

In Helen's proud heart the dart of Venus's  
messenger had already done its work ; and now

Cupid took another dart,

*(O Troy Town !)*

Fledged it for another heart,

Winged the shaft with the heart's desire,  
Drew the string and said, “ Depart ! ”

*(O Troy's down,  
Tall Troy's on fire !)*

Paris turned upon his bed,

*(O Troy Town !)*

Turned upon his bed and said,

Dead at heart with the heart's desire—  
“ Oh, to clasp her golden head ! ”

*(O Troy's down,  
Tall Troy's on fire !)*

The poem is interesting as being the only ballad in which Rossetti attempted to deal with a classical subject, but that subject loses something of its natural force by what Mr. Knight has aptly called its “ gothic setting.”

Akin in subject to “ Troy Town ” is the sonnet “ Venus,” called in the later editions “ Venus Verticordia ” :

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

## VENUS

(FOR A PICTURE)

She hath the apple in her hand for thee,  
Yet almost in her heart would hold it back ;  
She muses, with her eyes upon the track  
Of that which in thy spirit they can see.  
Haply, " Behold, he is at peace," saith she ;  
" Alas ! the apple for his lips,—the dart  
That follows its brief sweetness to his heart,—  
The wandering of his feet perpetually ! "

A little space her glance is still and coy,  
But if she give the fruit that works her spell,  
Those eyes shall flame as for her Phrygian boy.  
Then shall her bird's strained throat the woe foretell,  
And her far seas moan as a single shell,  
And her grove glow with love-lit fires of Troy.

The last line in this sonnet is changed in the later editions, considerably for the better ; it runs :

And through her dark grove strike the light of Troy.

The thought is more tersely expressed, and the awkward double " o " sound in " grove " and " glow " is lost.

The Past was always to Rossetti more real than the Present : with contemporary events he concerned himself but little, and with the judgments of others on those events still less.

In the historical ballads of his later volume, which are among his finest works, the Scotland of James I's time and the England of Henry I's

## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

are finely reproduced; but only by memory, not internal evidence, does one connect the year of the publication of the "Poems" with that of the Franco-German War. Perhaps the only lines in that volume into which can be read thoughts connected with the state of Europe at the time are those of the sonnet entitled

### ON REFUSAL OF AID BETWEEN NATIONS

Not that the earth is changing, O my God !

Nor that the seasons totter in their walk,—

Not that the virulent ill of act and talk

Seethes ever as a winepress ever trod,—

Not therefore are we certain that the rod

Weighs in Thine hand to smite Thy world ; though  
now

Beneath Thine hand so many nations bow,

So many kings :—not therefore, O my God !—

But because Man is parcelled out in men

To-day ; because, for any wrongful blow

No man not stricken asks, " I would be told

Why Thou dost thus " ; but his heart whispers then,

" He is He, I am I." By this we know

That our earth falls asunder, being old.

But, appropriate as it was to the state of European affairs on its publication, it had been written, though possibly in a different form, more than twenty years before. The "Pre-Raphaelite Journal" for Sunday, August 26 (1849), bears the following entry : " Gabriel wrote a sonnet entitled ' For the Things of these Days, ' " ; and below follows a note by Mr. W. M.

## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

Rossetti, "Must be the same as 'On the Refusal of Aid between Nations.'"

✓ To the end of his life Rossetti was a worker. His pictures never commanded sufficiently high prices during his lifetime to render him independent of money-making, though the publication of the "Poems" in 1870 had brought his name before the world in such a way as to add greatly to his artistic reputation. He was urged by his friends to develop further his efforts both in sonnet and ballad form, with the result that in 1881 he published a second volume of poems entitled "Ballads and Sonnets": the longest ballad in the book, "The King's Tragedy," has been pronounced by many good judges to be his finest work.

It evidently gained his own approval, for early in 1881 he wrote: "I am writing a ballad on the death of James I of Scots. It is already twice the length of 'The White Ship' and has a good slice still to come. It is called 'The King's Tragedy,' and is a ripper, I can tell you!"

The ballad reproduces with extraordinary power both the historical scenes and figures in the Scotland of our Henry VI's day and also that wild spirit of mystic superstition so deeply rooted in the Celtic mind and so beloved of Rossetti himself. That spirit haunts the whole poem in the figure of the woman, "gaunt and strong," who repeatedly warns King James of his doom, according to the legend of the shrouded wraith.

## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

She stands before him in the moonlight by the sea, as he is going north to keep his Christmas at Perth ; and she cries to him :

“ O King, thou art come at last ;  
But thy wraith has haunted the Scottish Sea  
To my sight for four years past.”

She foretells the accomplishment of his doom by the progress in her repeated visions of that cere-cloth, or winding-sheet, around his body. First his feet alone “ clung close in a shroud ” ; then, at intervals of a year, the sheet had risen over knees and breast and throat, until she now foresees the end at hand :

“ And when I meet thee again, O King,  
That of death hast such sore drouth,—  
Except thou turn again on this shore,—  
The winding-sheet shall have moved once more  
And covered thine eyes and mouth.”

But the King refuses her warning in lines which are among the finest Rossetti ever penned, and he goes on his way to meet his Fate,

“ to His will resign’d  
Who has but one same death for a hind  
And one same death for a king.”

Twice again in the poem comes the haunting cry, once when the woman is refused admission to the King’s presence at the feast and cries her last warning to the usher beneath the window, and once more when she announces the fulfilment of the doom in words for all to hear.



## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

No less vivid than the weird figure of this woman, and the superstition of which she is the embodiment, are the pictures of James I himself and his English bride, Joan of Somerset. James stands again before us in all the gallant grace bred in the long years of his captivity—those years in which the chivalry of England's knighthood had been his training and Prince Hal and the wise John of Bedford his companions. Throughout the poem rings an echo of his famous utterance, for the fulfilment of which he died : " I will make the key keep the castle, and the brackenbush keep the cow, though I live the life of a dog to bring it about."

For he had tamed the nobles' lust  
And curbed their power and pride,  
And reached out an arm to right the poor  
Through Scotland far and wide.

Another true note that sounds throughout the ballad is that which tells of the passionate love uniting to the end the royal pair, from the day when

At Scone were the happy lovers crowned,  
A heart-wed King and Queen,

to the eve of his death, when

the King was loth to stir from her side  
For as on the day when she was his bride,  
Even so he loved her yet.

The tale of life at the northern court has nowhere been better told than in these simple

## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

rolling lines; the grim scenes in Scottish history rise one after the other with almost unbroken historical accuracy, and yet glowing with the genius alike of painter and of poet. We see in turn the state of Scotland, being slowly reclaimed from lawless misery; the angry and rebellious barons, divided by their fierce and often hereditary feuds; and Catherine Douglas, who tells the tale, and who earned her proud title of Kate Barlass by her gallant attempt to stay the King's murderers with her arm thrust through the stanchions of the vanished bolts:

"'Twas Catherine Douglas sprang to the door,  
But I fell back Kate Barlass."

In the weird woman's last despairing cry beneath the chamber window occurs one of the few historical inaccuracies of the poem; the King's death took place in the Monastery of the Black Friars, and not the Charterhouse. It is well to notice this small point, especially as the value of such a ballad for young students, in giving life to the dead bones of history, can hardly be over-estimated. The spirit of Scotch tragedy is faithfully reproduced throughout the poem, the characters are true to life, the details move one as those of to-day, and stanzas are cleverly inserted from James's own poem, "The King's Quair." Toward the end the verses seem to glow with the smouldering fire of the hidden plot; then the fire bursts forth, and the "King's Tragedy" is seen in all its horror: Catherine Douglas's act of futile grandeur is

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

accomplished, she has fallen back Kate Barlass,  
and in the Pit of Fortune's Wheel the

King lay slain  
With sixteen wounds in his breast.

Then the ballad sinks to a minor key ; it tells of the pursuit and capture of the traitors one by one, and of the awful fate meted out to them by command of the widowed Queen ; and it ends with the picture, as sad as any ever seen in history or fiction, that of the broken-hearted Joan of Scotland in her frenzied exultation over her revenge :

And then she said,—“ My King, they are dead ! ”  
And she knelt on the chapel-floor,  
And whispered low with a strange proud smile,—  
“ James, James, they suffered more ! ”

The ballad of “ The White Ship ” does not rise to the same heights of inspired song as does “ The King's Tragedy,” but it gives a vivid reproduction of a famous episode in English history, and there is something akin to inspiration in the choice of such a metre for such a subject. As all light died out in the life of Henry I when his son was drowned, so all spirit seems quenched in the dull monotony, that becomes at times almost a drone, of the two-lined verses in which the ballad runs. Nothing could accord better with the dull, sad utterances of “ poor Berold,” “ the butcher of Rouen ” who tells the tale :

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

'Twas so in my youth I heard men say,  
And my old age calls it back to-day.

We see once more Henry I in his last loveless years, and we live again with him through the tragic scenes that ended the hopes of his life.

The journey to Normandy is described, with its fatal homeward passage; the request of "stout Fitz-Stephen," the "pilot famous in seafaring," to guide the King's voyage in his "famed White Ship," and Henry's bestowal on him as passengers of the Prince and his sister. The story of the voyage is followed faithfully, and the end of the Prince whom "nothing beseemed like his manner of dying":

He was a Prince of lust and pride;  
He showed no grace till the hour he died.

God only knows where his soul did wake,  
But I saw him die for his sister's sake.

Then the scene opens again in the quiet moonlight, where the knight and the pilot and the poor butcher are all that remain on the sea's broad breast out of that gay ship's company.

Faithful to the story, Fitz-Stephen is made to sink of his own free will at the news of the Prince's death; then Godefroy de l'Aigle's strength gives out, and Berold is left alone.

Three hundred souls were all lost but one,  
And I drifted over the sea alone.

# ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

Then he tells of his rescue, his confession to the priest, and his journey with him

To King Henry's court at Winchester.

All know how none dared tell the news ;  
and the ballad seems to drop out its monotonous lines, one after another, in curious accordance with that time of waiting : there is a moment's relief at the entry before the King

Of a little boy with golden hair ;

but he comes only to tell the awful news of the Prince's death, and the royal father sinks backward "as a man struck dead."

But this King never smiled again :

The famous saying is given prominence by being printed alone, as a separate verse ; and the ballad ends with a repetition of the opening stanza :

By none but we can the tale be told,  
The butcher of Rouen, poor Berold.

*(Lands are swayed by a king on a throne.)*

'Twas a royal train put forth to sea,  
Yet the tale can be told by none but me.

*(The sea hath no king but God alone.)*

It had been at Kelmscott Manor, in 1871, his brother tells us, that Rossetti began the third long ballad of the volume, "Rose Mary," which does not deal with an historical subject.



## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

The mystic beryl-stone of the East, in which none but the pure may read, is the key on which the story turns, the story of Rose Mary and her sin and sorrow :

Of her two fights with the Beryl-stone :  
Lost the first, but the second won.

It is a fine ballad, but must be studied as a whole to be fully appreciated, with its rich imagination, its Oriental touches, and the simple pathos of its story. There are no more musical lines in the volume than are found here, in the cry of the stricken mother and daughter to one another :

" Hush, sweet, hush ! be calm and behold."  
" I see two floodgates broken and old :  
The grasses wave o'er the ruined weir,  
But the bridge still leads to the breakwater ;  
And—mother, mother, O mother dear ! "

The mother looked on the daughter still  
As on a hurt thing that's yet to kill.  
Then wildly at length the pent tears came ;  
The love swelled high with the swollen shame,  
And their hearts' tempest burst on them.

These three ballads formed with " The House of Life " the chief part of Rossetti's volume of 1881, though there are many other poems in it, and also in the earlier volume, with which it has been impossible to deal, but which should never remain unknown to any student of literature.

## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

Translation was another gift in which Rossetti was pre-eminent among English poets : his volume, "The Early Italian Poets," published in 1861, was, as his brother puts it, "very well received—so far as a book of translated poems has in this country a chance of welcome and encomium—and gave Rossetti a sufficiently solid position as a scholar in his own line of study, and a poet as well, for it was recognized that none save a poet in his own right could have made such a transfer of poetry from one language into another." Italian was, of course, to him an early known medium for expression, but his genius for translating the spirit as well as the words of a poem is shown also in other tongues. A well-known English classical scholar places as high as any translated verse in the English language his "Ballad of Dead Ladies," from François Villon, and "One Girl (a combination from Sappho)."

But the fifty-four years were drawing to a close, and Rossetti's career was nearly over. Changes to country air, to Kelmscott Manor and the Lakes, were powerless to arrest his illness, or the use of the drug which was killing him. Perhaps with such a nature as his it was best that the end should not be longer drawn out. He enjoyed the society of his friends to the last, and he had but just been visited by Philip Bourke Marston and his father, when he was suddenly stricken with paralysis of the right side. This was the beginning of the end. In January 1882 he was moved down

## ROSSETTI & HIS POETRY

to Birchington, a little place on the Kentish coast about four miles from Margate, to the house of Mr. J. P. Seddon. The loving friendship and family affection which had enriched his life did not fail him at the last : his mother was with him and his brother and sister, and a faithful band of friends, and in their presence he passed away on Easter Day, April 9, 1882, at the age of fifty-four.

So died Dante Gabriel Rossetti, a man hard to place among English poets because he was an Italian as well as an Englishman, a painter as well as a poet. He had the double nature, and some have found it hard to forgive him the double weaknesses which that nature entailed.

He lived and wrote in an atmosphere heavy with scent and sound and beauty, essentially un-English ; but for that very reason his work is of special value, and he holds a unique position among English poets.

For though the atmosphere was heavy, the man who dwelt within it was a genius ; and even as that genius echoed in the memory of his friends on that April morning round the Kentish grave, so it must echo always to us in the varied beauties of "The House of Life," the wild music of "Sister Helen," or the matchless wonder of "The Blessed Damozel."

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